

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Survey Analysis to support the Community Gardens Policy Review



City of Sydney
December 2020

About Astrolabe Group

Experts with Empathy

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¹ <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/community-gardens>

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1 Introduction

Community gardening creates more green patches of vegetables, plants and flowers within densely built urban spaces. The City of Sydney (the City) has 23 approved community gardens across the local government area. Their use is guided by the *Community Gardens Policy and Guidelines*², published in February 2016.

The City is currently undergoing a review of this policy and related guidelines documents to create contemporary guidelines for the use of the community gardens. To support this review, the City undertook engagement across October and November 2020 to understand community needs and aspirations.

This included a survey – which received 346 total responses, with 200 completed surveys, from 31 answerable questions. The survey was open from 19 October–9 November 2020.

The survey and two online community workshops were promoted directly to convenors of community gardens for distribution to members, as well as across the City's communication and social media channels. An A3 promotional poster was displayed at all community garden sites to invite feedback, with a QR Code linking to the consultation web page on the City's web site.

This report provides an analysis of the survey to better understand the results and identify emerging themes from the community.

1.1 Key Insights

These data show that there is widespread support for community gardens. There are also high expectations on the role of community gardens in supporting more green space across the City of Sydney.

Community gardens were viewed as important across all respondents. The gardens' role was recognised in building social connections, supporting the environment and good health, and introducing young people to how food is grown.

People who took part in this research were clear about wanting more community gardens and the need for more access to composting. Community gardens were seen as a solution for more open space and reducing food waste, which may indicate the need for greater awareness of the role of relevant zoning or bylaws affecting land use.

People want more communication from community gardens. Non-members in particular wanted to know more and to have more opportunities to be involved with community gardens. Providing examples of different ways of involvement would be useful for community garden leadership groups.

Increased communication and transparency were two ways people thought community gardens could be made more accessible. Respondents also consistently cited the need to meet disability guidelines, with the provision of raised garden beds a common recommendation.

There was a lot of interest among respondents in learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and culture in relation to native flora. This was a well-regarded role for the

² <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/policies/community-gardens-policy>

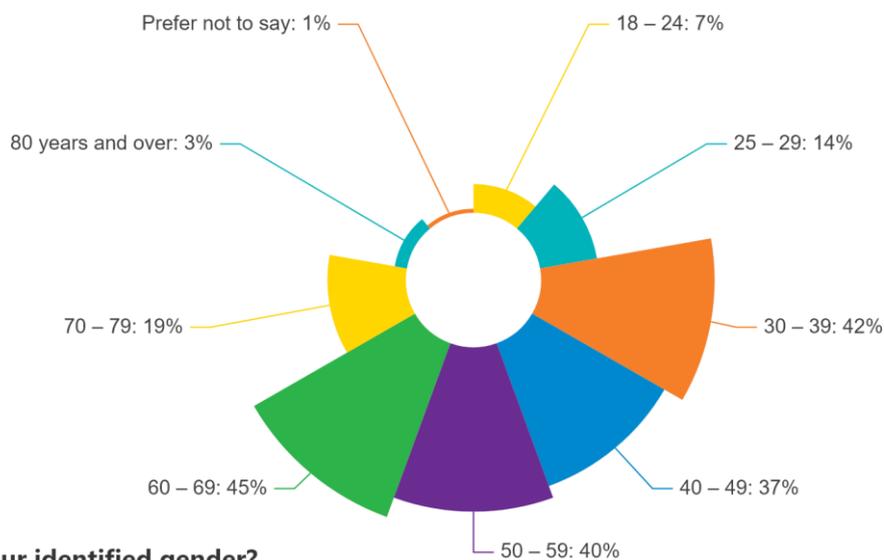
gardens and a high priority future opportunity. Workshops, events and talks were all recommendations for how to share knowledge and culture more broadly.

Diverse views were shared about the role of the *Guidelines*: from needing to be simpler on one hand, to setting out explicit expectations and being enforced by Council on the other. Robust governance of resources and access on public land is a reasonable expectation and does not have to impose onerous tasks on garden members.

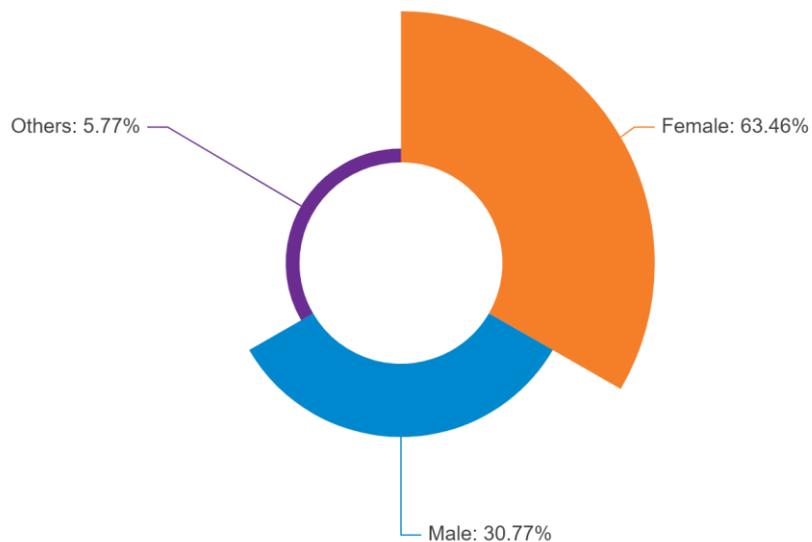
1.2 Data sources

Analysis in this report is from a survey administered electronically by the City of Sydney with responses collected from both members and non-members of community gardens. The survey took place during 2020 when Sydney was affected by periods of lockdown, quarantine and social distancing rules. There were 382 survey responses, with over half aged 50 years and older and most in a couple of living alone (common living circumstances for this older age group).

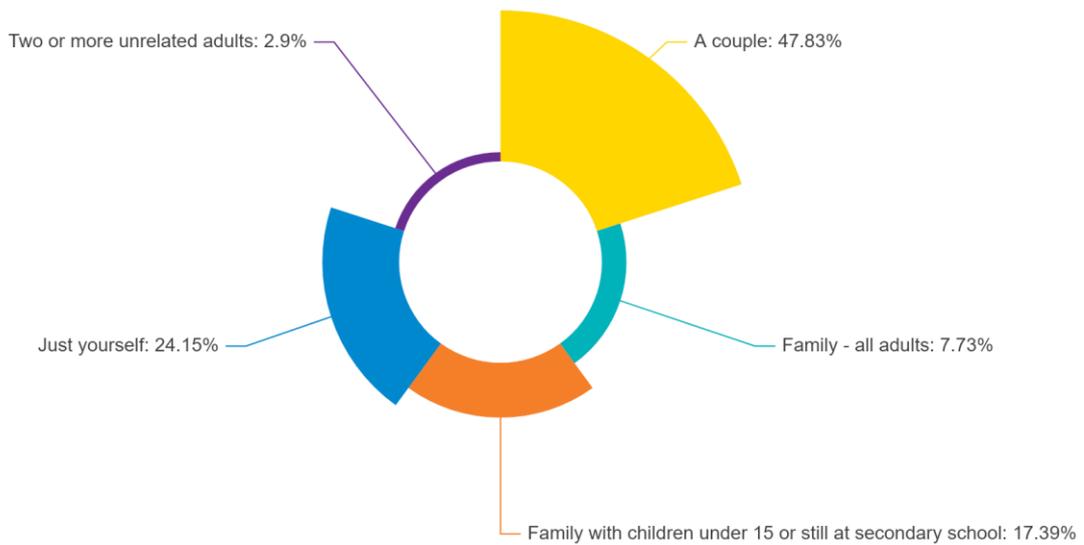
What is your approximate age?



What is your identified gender?



What best describes your household?



Which of the following best describes your current place of residence?

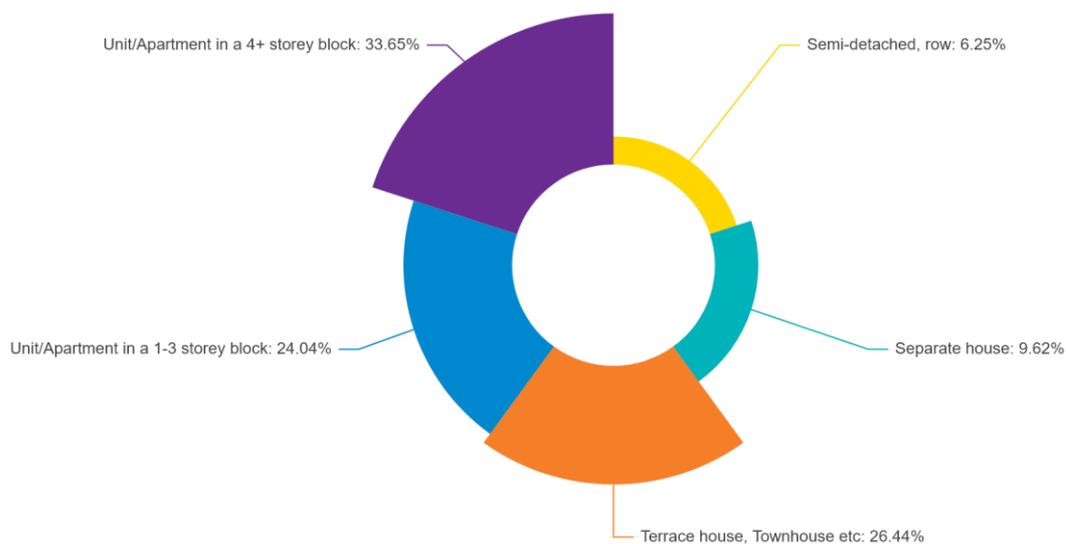


Figure 1: Survey respondent characteristics

A comparison of characteristics of survey respondents with those of the usual resident population as measured by the 2016 Census of Population and Dwellings (Table 1) shows that men and young people were under-represented. Survey respondents were dominated by person living in couple only and lone person households, reflecting the age profile of people taking part in the survey. Family with children (adults or dependents) and group households were under-represented in the survey.

Most survey participants lived in apartments (58%) but this is much less than the 73% of people who live in apartments across the City. While there may have been some changes since the 2016 Census, these have not been enough to fundamentally shift the City of Sydney’s underlying age and household structures.

This comparison reflects the age profile of current members of community gardens and reinforces difficulties engaging with young people and apartment dwellers encountered in a range of data collection processes. It highlights that there are groups in the community who may have views about community gardens or who would benefit from participation for whom we have limited information.

Characteristic		CoS Survey 2020 (%)	2016 Census (%)
Sex	Male	30.8	51.8
	Female	63.5	48.2
Age group	under 40	30.3	56.3
	40-59	37.0	21.2
	60+	32.2	11.7
Household type	Couple only	47.8	29.7
	Lone person	24.2	37.3
	Families with children ⁽¹⁾	7.7	17.5
	Unrelated adults	2.9	15.5
Dwelling type	Separate house	9.6	2.7
	Attached and semi-detached ⁽²⁾	26.4	22.9
	1-3 storey units/apartments	24.1	11.7
	4+ storey units/apartments	33.7	61.5

Table 1: Comparison of characteristics of survey respondents compared to the total population

(1) Include couples with children and lone parents with children, and includes parents living with adult children as well as dependent children.

(2) Includes semi-detached, terrace and town houses.

Sources: City of Sydney Community Garden Survey and ABS, 2016 Census of Population and Dwellings.

An additional 13 paper-based surveys were completed by members of the Waterloo Estate Community Garden.

1.3 Methods used

Quantitative data were cleaned to remove duplicates so that results could be analysed according to whether respondents were members of a community garden or not (Figure 2). There were 330 people who answered this question. Responses from persons who answered 'no' when asked if they were currently involved in a community garden and answered 'I would like to be involved' were analysed as only 'I would like to be involved'.³ This delivered 128 responses from community garden members, 100 from those who were not members and would not like to be involved and 100 who were not member and would like to be involved. Of note is that only two respondents were on a waitlist. Responses were analysed according to respondents' involvement.

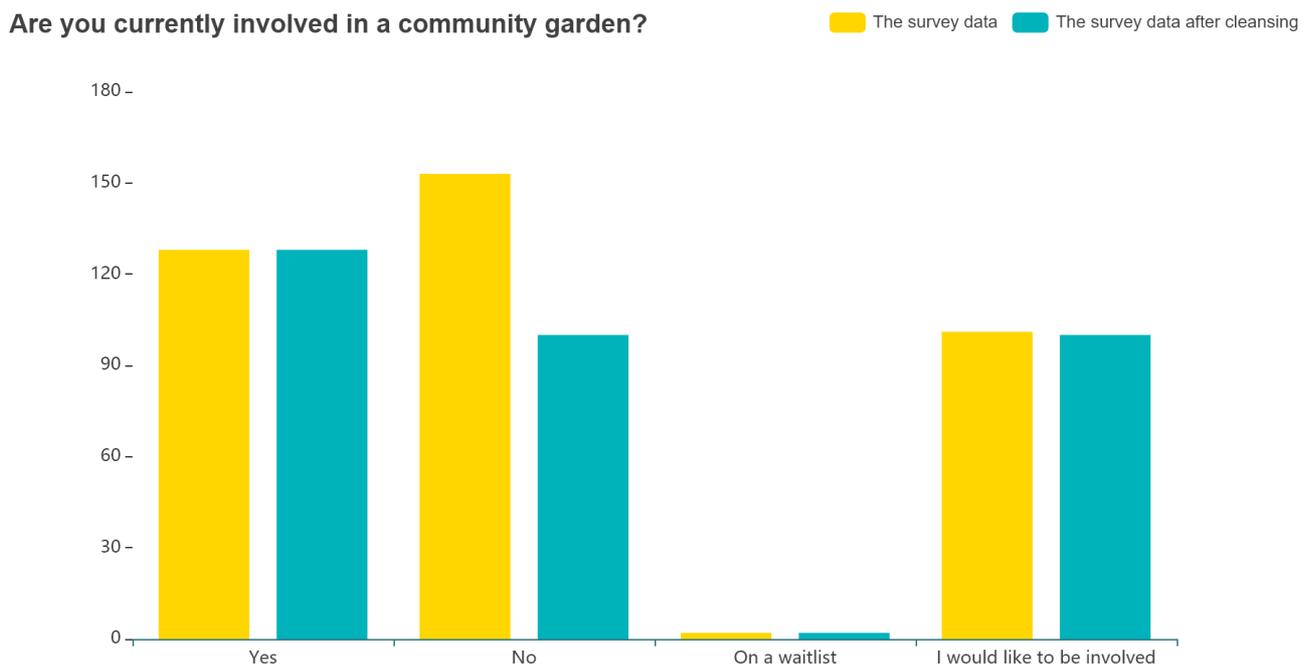


Figure 2: Number of respondents currently involved in a community garden

Among respondents to the electronic survey who were members of a community garden, the biggest groups were from Lawrence Hargraves Reserve Kings Cross and Bourke Street Park Community Gardens (Figure 3). All gardens managed by the City of Sydney received responses.

Results from the Waterloo Estate Community Garden paper based (n=13) and on-line (n=7) surveys have been combined in a separate analysis to provide a snapshot from this community garden. Due to different collection methods, there is no way to ascertain if there is any double counting of responses.

³ Cleaning meant 53 responses that were recorded as both “No” (not involved in a community garden) and “I would like to be involved” were analysed as not being a member but wanting to be involved. One respondent had answered “Yes” they were a member of a community garden and “I would like to be involved”. This response was analysed as being a member of a community garden. This process meant any differences between those not a member and wanting to be involved and those not a member and not wanting further involvement could be analysed.



Figure 3: Distribution of survey responses from community garden members

Qualitative responses from the survey were collated, and key word analysis undertaken to identify common themes. Some detailed responses are used to reinforce key themes.

2 Context

2.1 The importance of community gardens and green space

2.1.1 The impact of COVID-19

This research and review are taking place during a global pandemic. As people's movement has been restricted, along with other impacts to our wellbeing and mental health, access to green space was identified as critical in the survey.

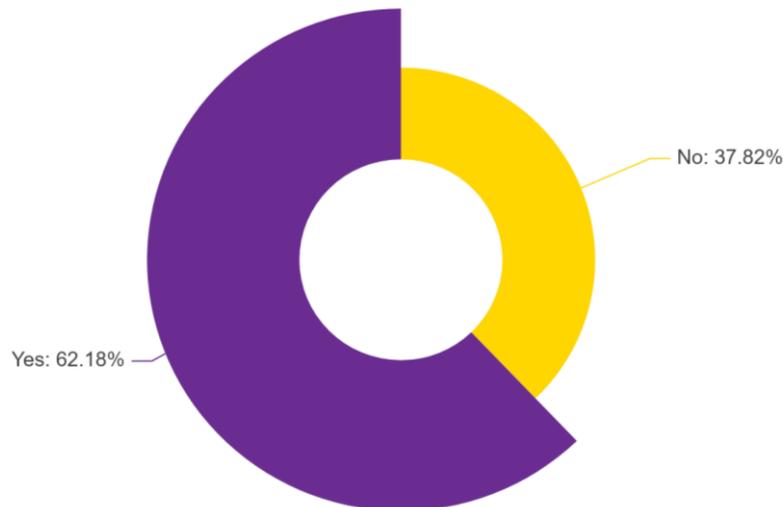


Figure 4: Share of respondents who met in the community garden during COVID-19 lockdowns (n=119)

These insights are also supported by the findings from the 2020 National Pandemic Gardening Survey, conducted in June and July 2020⁴. The survey found growing food, particularly in visible or public spaces, has a powerful capacity to bring people together, create new friendships and foster social connections.

⁴ <https://sustain.org.au/projects/pandemic-gardening-survey-report>

3 Community Survey Results

3.1 Community gardens now

3.1.1 The importance of community gardens

The main reasons community gardens were seen as important were to:

- build social connections,
- contribute to a sustainable urban environment,
- contribute to people’s health and fitness
- introduce children and young people to how food is grown.

What are the main reasons you think community gardens are important in City of Sydney?

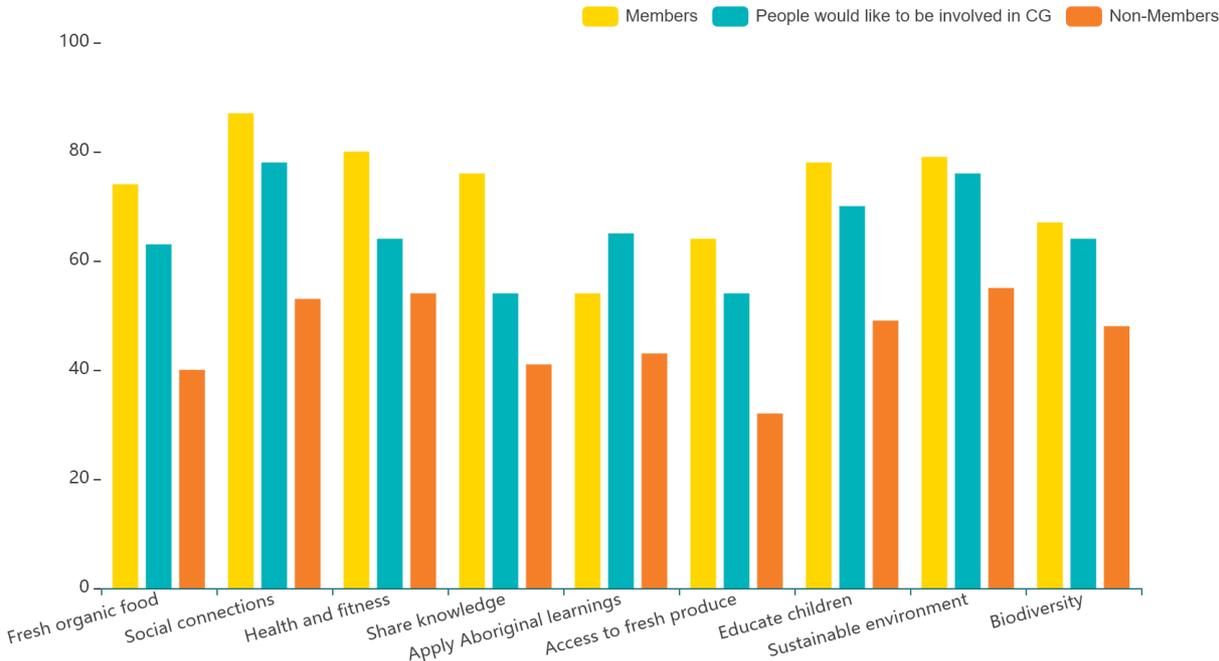


Figure 6: Reasons people think community gardens are important (n=274)

Except for ‘Gardens playing a role in learning about native plants and their use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People’, members identified more strongly with all reasons for the importance of community gardens, followed by non-members who would like to be involved in a community garden.

Even taking these differences into account there is a clear community view that community gardens play an important role in the City of Sydney, particularly in relation to sustainability, social connections, and for introducing young people to how food is grown.

Respondents also had the option to add their own comments to this question. Comments focused on mental health, nature, composting, protecting green space, and the environment.

“To build a greener Sydney - reducing landfill, contributing to cleaner and greener air. To learn about origins of plants, their importance to our lives and how we can use them in daily life. As food and medicine. To improve mental health and wellbeing.”

“For composting purposes and to reduce carbon emissions.”

“To retain existing open green space, that is cared for and cherished by the community, also an urban corridor, to protect it from becoming a development and lost to the community forever.”

“As a place to practise co-operation, as a retreat from hectic life, as a place to contribute to people’s mental wellbeing.”

3.1.2 Interest in community gardens

When people were asked about their own reasons for being interested in community gardens, the dominant reasons were:

- Spending time in fresh air
- Well-being and mental health
- Meeting other people
- Liking gardening, but not having the space at home.

What are your main reasons for your interest in community gardens?

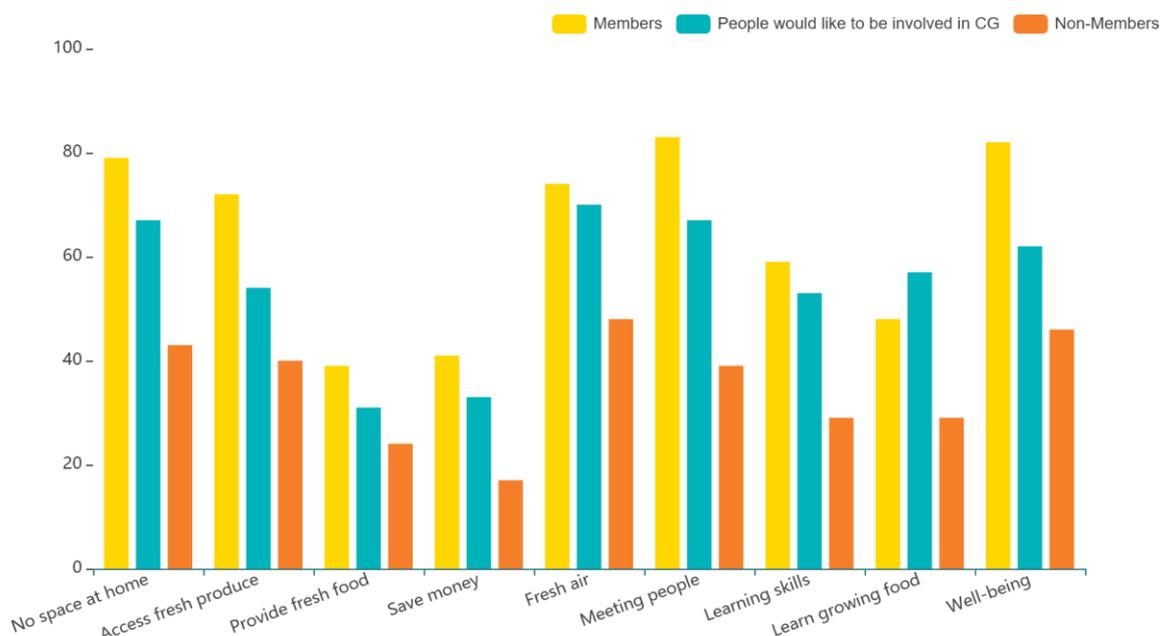


Figure 7: Reasons people are interested in community gardens (n=303)

Not surprisingly, members reported the strongest reasons for being interested in community gardens across all answers, except for, 'learning how to grow food'. In the same vein, non-members who would like to be involved in a community garden were more likely to report being interested to learn about growing food – undoubtedly one of the reasons they would like to be more involved. The least rated reasons for being involved were providing 'fresh food to family and friends' and 'saving money' (almost one-third of respondents cited saving money as a reason).

To what extent has your access to fresh food improved through involvement with a community garden?

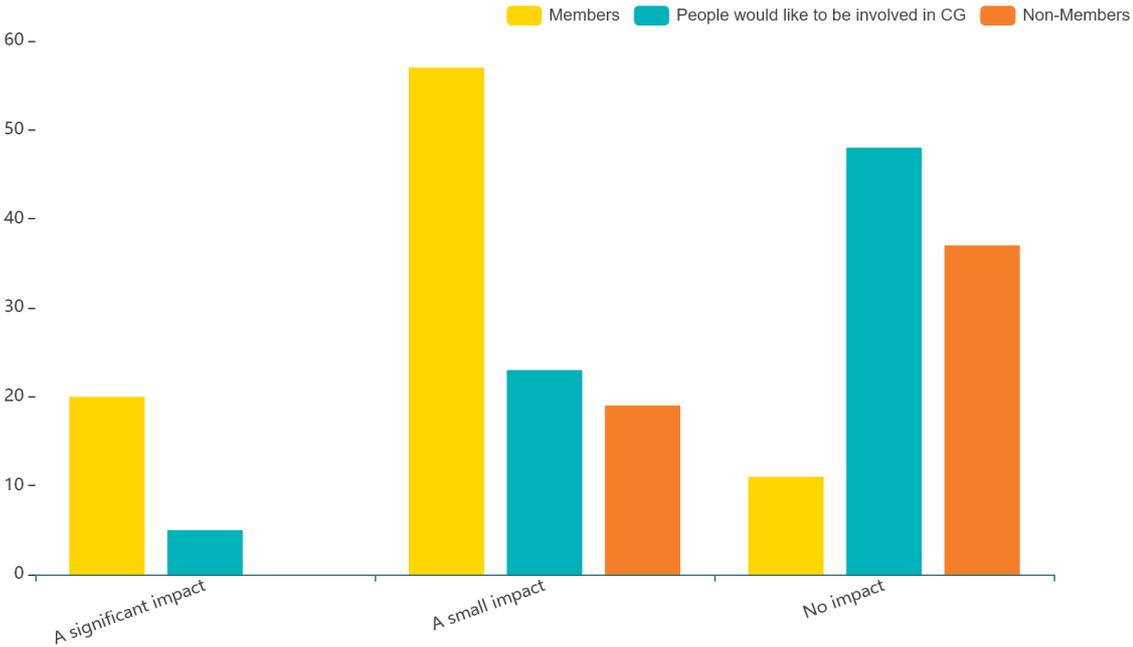


Figure 8: Level of improved access to fresh food because of community garden by member status (n=221)

Additional reasons given for people’s interest in community gardens in the open responses was dominated by access to composting (19 extra written comments). Being part of a community also featured highly.

“I am retired and very much value the chance to meet other people in my neighbourhood. I cannot tell you how hard this becomes for older people.”

“It’s an opportunity to catch up on any local gossip I may have missed.”

“Putting food scraps in the compost, learning about how to look after chickens, seeing how happy the local kids and adults are in the garden, building a greater community and seeing everyone connect over the garden, helping out generally.”

Given how important access to fresh produce was to respondents in relation to their reasons for an interest in community gardens, it was surprising that there was only a small or no impact on access to fresh food for respondents. Even among members, only a small impact was recorded – perhaps reflecting the range of produce in the gardens. Not surprisingly there was no impact for most non-members, although the small impact on access reported by non-members is an indication that some community gardens either distribute or allow access to their produce to people who aren't members.

3.1.3 City of Sydney’s role supporting community gardens

There were slight differences between community garden members and non-members in the most important roles for the City of Sydney in supporting community gardens (see Figure 9).

- Members thought it was access to grant funding through the City’s grant program and networking opportunities.
- People who would like to join or participate thought it was the supply of plants and material such as compost and mulch and to provide ongoing support to existing gardens.
- Other non-members thought it was to provide help with establishing a new garden and support to existing gardens.

<i>What roles are important for the City of Sydney to support and facilitate community garden groups and to establish and maintain community gardens?</i>				
Top three responses – ‘Most important’				
All Participants (n=243)	 Provide ongoing support to existing gardens	 Access to educational opportunities	 Supply of plants and materials, such as compost and mulch	
Community Garden Members (n=96)	 Access to grant funding, through City’s Grants program	 Providing networking opportunities within groups	 Access to educational opportunities	
People on a waitlist or who would like to join (n=84)	 Supply of plants and materials, such as compost and mulch	 Provide ongoing support to existing gardens	 Access to educational opportunities	
Non-Members (n=63)	 Provide assistance with establishing a new garden	 Provide ongoing support to existing gardens	 Access to educational opportunities	

There were 103 additional written responses to this question on the City's role, with a wide range of comments relating to creating tool sharing hubs, recognising all gardens and allowing for more, greater access to garden space, supporting rubbish collection, and providing oversight.

“A city like Sydney really needs to recognise how diverse the inner city dweller population is ... I live here for the local hospital for my chronic health conditions. I'd love a community garden as a chance to meet people who are working hard to stay healthy.”

“Actively dedicate large sections of parkland to community gardens. Or convert some of the dead spaces into indoor gardens ... these could become good hubs and vibrant gathering spots.”

“More consistency across the groups at the leadership level to ensure minimum standards of organisation and inclusion are met”.

“City actively tries to stop community gardens in my area Dawes Point ... when I had planter boxes built for outside our house council threatened us with \$1,000 per day fine if they weren't removed.”

The diversity of responses to this question shows that the role of the City in relation to community gardens is not always widely understood, and that the differences between City and State government control are not always recognised. There was a view that the City should be available to support conflict-resolution, ensure the same standards and access across all gardens, and provide advice when needed. Respondents wanted the City's support but also wanted to retain community-ownership.

“As much as we can, we try to be self-supporting. But at times we might need some in-kind assistance or some help to build or repair some of the garden infrastructure. The council has been great in the past. We try not to be too 'needy', but we are grateful for the help we get when we do have to ask.”

“As much support as possible but allowing garden members to run their garden.”

3.1.4 Community composting

As already noted, composting is seen as a key role for community gardens and a reason people are interested in being involved. When asked to rate the importance of community composting, it was almost universally rated on the higher end of the scale (Figure 9).

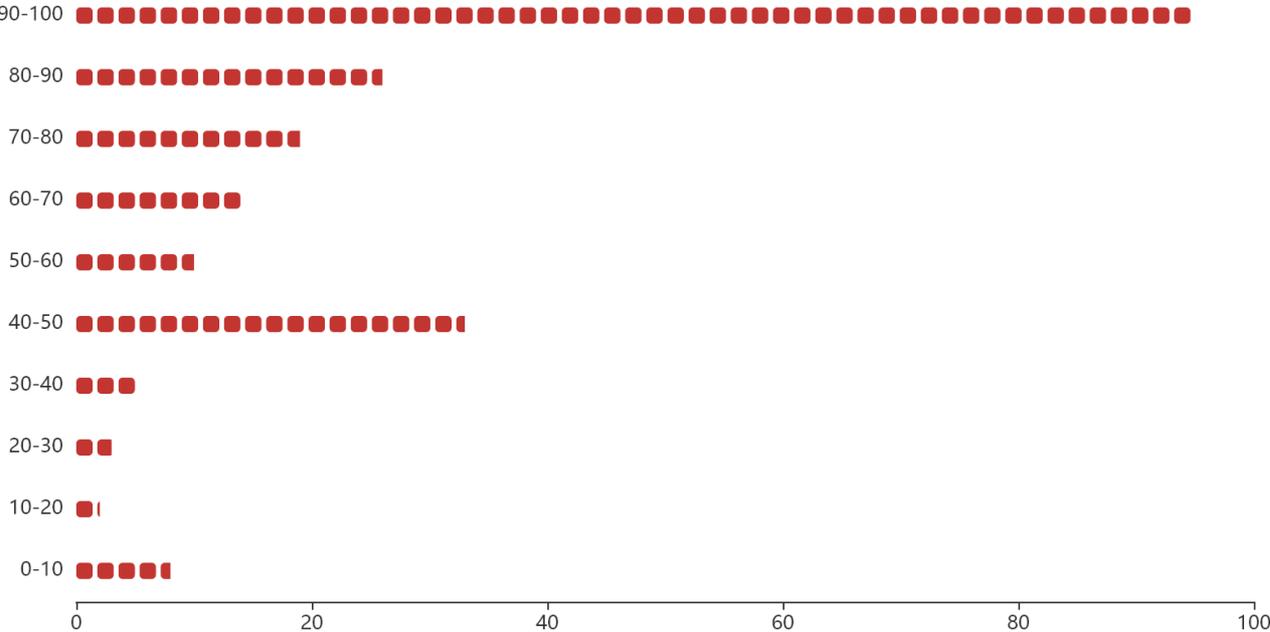


Figure 9: Distribution of importance of community composting on scale of 0 (not important) to 100 (very important) (n=216)

Reasons for low scores were because composting was not happening at the moment, or respondents didn't have any access to composting in their apartment buildings. Some respondents reported not being able to access facilities that were nearby because of locked gates. Several people also talked about the disincentives for local composting because of rats.

Those who rated community composting on the highest scale had two main reasons for giving this score. First was because of the importance of composting to reduce food wastage and to stop food waste going to landfill. Second was because they had experience of taking food scraps to their local garden.

“Countless people in the surrounding community who don’t have space to compost at home use our garden’s composting facilities, and it’s also provide[d] a place for connection albeit it briefly, and to reduce food waste and emissions from these.”

3.2 Community gardens in the future

3.2.1 Future opportunities for community gardens

There were diverse views among respondents in terms of what opportunities they would like to see for community gardens in the future, aside from being a member. Among members the most highly rated opportunity was to learn about native plants and their use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples were also the most highly rated opportunity by non-members, alongside open days. For non-members who would like to be involved, gardening lessons were the most important opportunity.

Aside from being a member of a garden, what opportunities would you like to see?

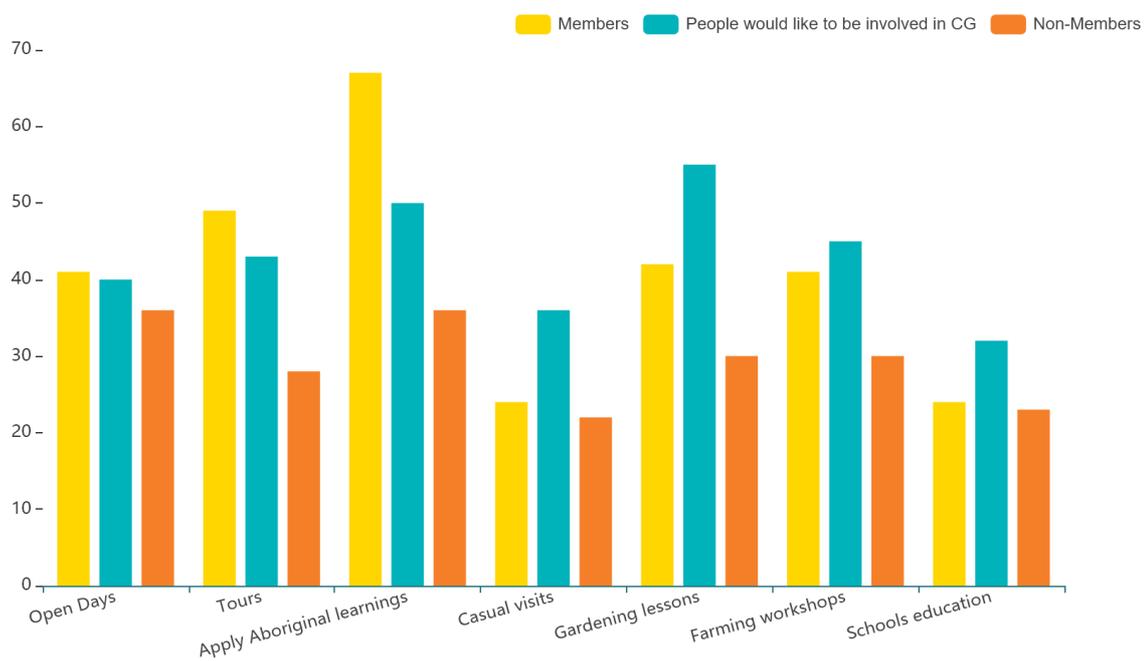


Figure 10: Opportunities wanted at community gardens in addition to membership (n=217)

Education and learning opportunities were rated highly across all groups – from tours and schools' education, to gardening and farming lessons or workshops, and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

People also wrote additional comments about having different levels of access, relating to both time commitments and disability access.

“blitz days’ that get people from the community who might not be already involved in the garden to come and assist on a one off basis with a larger task such as preparing beds, planting, setting up new areas etc.”

“Being able to have different levels of access/commitment - one size fits all doesn't work. Definitely need more casual visits.”

“I would like to see wheelchair access to gardens and gardens set up for disabled people, also disabled people live in my area and have their own gardens where they live but find it hard to manage perhaps some of the gardening groups would like to help these people also.”

3.2.2 Future vision for community gardens

When asked about their vision for the future of community gardens all respondents wanted more gardens. Several respondents writing that gardens should be within walking distance of all City of Sydney residents or in every suburb. Regardless of whether respondents were members or not they all highlighted the importance of community, people, space and food (Figure 11).



Figure 11: Vision for the future of City of Sydney community gardens – top 20 word frequency (n=260)

This question raised concern that building development would see community gardens disappear. The absence of Erskineville Road Community Garden from the list of community gardens was a concern, with several respondents wanting it recognised.

There was concern that sites where redevelopment was scheduled to happen in the future would be wasteland in the interim and could be gardened (e.g. Waterloo Estate). Many respondents wrote about creating community gardens in all parks, along verges, and vacant lots “squeezed between buildings”. Several people also wrote about including gardens as a requirement when large strata apartments were built to ensure garden access.

“I wish there were mixed used community gardens: some 'communal' beds were new gardeners can learn new skills and individual allotments ... because individual allotments reduce potential social tensions ... I would also like community gardens to be more distributed ... There is some verge action and a possibility would be to reinforce that (like in Chippendale), also by expanding existing verges to reduce traffic speed.”

Developing greater use of footpaths or verges for gardening were common themes, alongside access to rooftop gardens. It's seen as an easy way to increase access to green space for residents and for the City.

“My particular interest is in footpath gardening and it's great to see how many neighbourhoods have engaged with making their streets more beautiful and accommodating of wildlife. I would like to see more encouragement and support coming from the City for community volunteering in footpath gardening. Engaging families in projects near their homes would be easy I reckon. We can look after plants you put in such as new street trees and flowering native shrubs. Lots of natives to create habitats for wildlife.”

Some respondent's visions for the future were about garden infrastructure, such as the need for more lots, fencing, or access to tools or about governance and a call for greater transparency on how the garden is managed.

Non-members wrote about community gardens being open to all with no barriers to entry, including opening times out of work hours, allowing non-members access to produce growing in abundance, and having community garden leaders who welcomed visitors.

Non-members also wrote about community gardens playing a role in feeding homeless people or sharing a proportion of produce more widely. While members wrote about community gardens being a place to access fresh produce, their view was that the work of the garden would be shared rather than the produce.

Another area where members and non-members differed in their view of the future was in relation to composting and being able to reduce green waste. Non-members thought community gardens were a way to access composting, but members highlighted the cost and time resources needed to manage green waste provided by the community.

The common vision for the future, however, was protecting existing gardens and allowing for more.

“It’s a place for lots of single and smaller household demographics to connect, enjoy fresh produce and also promotes more greenery in the area. There’s no downsides. Do it.”



Image: Sydney City Farm, St Peters.

3.2.3 Making community gardens more inclusive and accessible

Respondents were asked for their ideas on how the City of Sydney can ensure community gardens are inclusive and accessible. Community was highlighted in a variety of ways – from promotion and communication locally, to recognising the diversity of people wanting access (see Figure 12).

People had a lot of ideas about improving access in five broad areas:

1. Meeting disability access guidelines (e.g. flat surfaces, raised garden beds)
2. Better signs and communication of opening hours and how to be involved, including on-line information and in language spoken locally
3. How gardens were managed, the role of garden leaders and the use of terms of reference or rules
4. Meeting the needs of diverse age groups
5. More open access and flexibility in how to be involved.

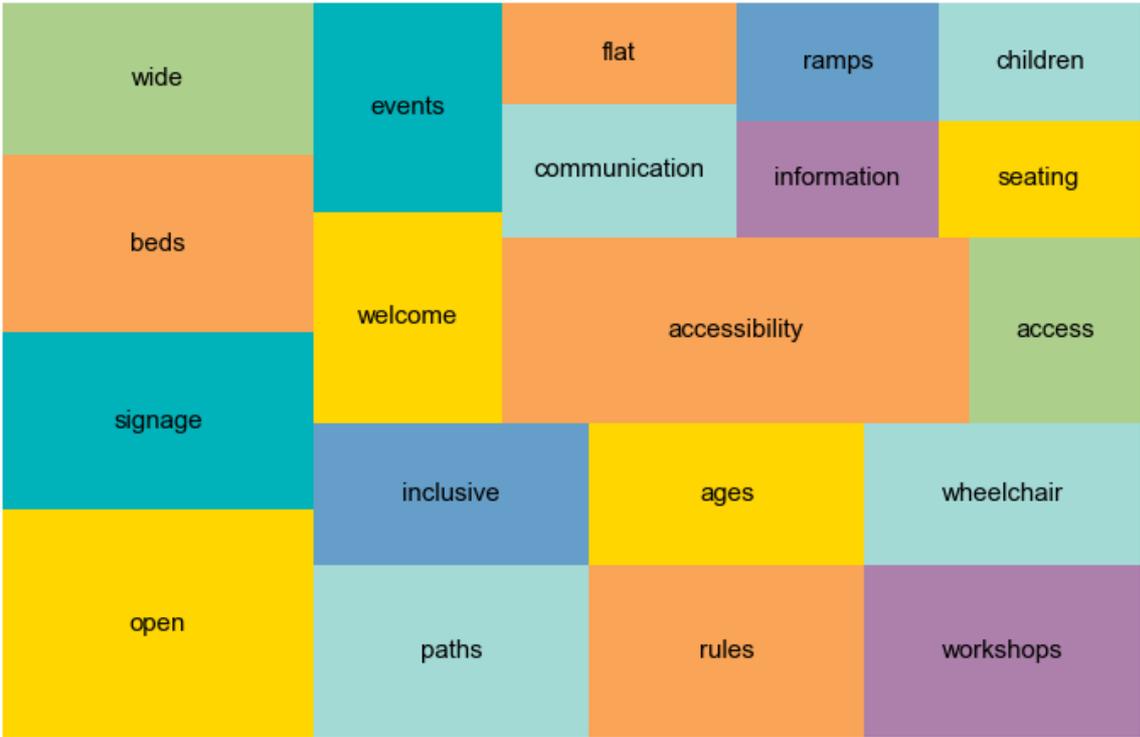


Figure 12: Ideas for improving accessibility and inclusivity for City of Sydney community gardens – top 20 word frequency (n=249)

Some respondents acknowledged that there was not one solution for improving access. Many saw a role for the City in supporting access or identified that creating links with community organisations who could support people with special needs could help.

“This is hard. Volunteers at community gardens maybe unable, unwilling or too busy to give the sort of time and resources that people with special needs often require. I have worked in many community organisations and have never found one that manages this well.”

Many respondents identified physical barriers to access that could be addressed to improve accessibility. This included raised garden beds, flat surfaces for wheelchairs or mobility aids, and wide access corridors between beds. Others identified access to tools suitable for people with limited strength or who have to work one-handed, disabled toilets, and seating for rest breaks. Several people talked about implementing disability access guidelines, and that all gardens should adhere to these. While no respondents wrote of how this infrastructure would be funded, there was an implicit assumption that it would be provided by the City.

A common issue raised was the lack of signage or communication about community gardens and how to be involved. Several respondents said they would like to find out more online, or have signs at the garden that included opening hours and who to contact if you wanted to be involved.

“Well that is difficult - I didn't even know there was one and I live next door to it! There was no signage - I thought it belonged to the old lady group. More signage, more plots, more space.”

There were many long responses raising issues of cliques at community gardens, discouraging new members, or concerns about the transparency of operations at each garden in relation to how fees were used or wait list processes. Some members compared their experience across gardens and greater transparency was often seen as an indicator that members were happier and more open. This was linked to calls for common terms of reference, limited terms on management committees, and public reporting on all aspects of operation.

“I was previously a member of [another] garden however I found the meetings arduous and difficult ... In comparison Bourke St garden is transparently run so all members appear happier which means the focus is on gardening and growing.”

Age was raised as a barrier to access to community gardens, but in different contexts. Many respondents wanted gardens to be more child-friendly: providing a play area, children's watering cans and having plain language signs about the plants and the garden. Others thought there was already enough infrastructure at playgrounds and in parks for children. The older age profile among current members was also noted by respondents as a disincentive to take part for younger adults, which has flow on effects for access to children. Some older respondents wrote that the garden was

a safe space for people of their age, away from busy places with lots of people, and more activities for their age group would increase access. This diversity of views reflects the heterogeneity across the people who live in the City of Sydney.

“To be honest currently I don’t feel welcome, purely because most of the folks in my community garden are elderly and they show a possessiveness towards the garden. I understand how important this is to them, so wonder if we can create some times or spaces when the 20-40 age group can have an opportunity to learn - potentially from some of the elders who are more open to letting us have a go.”

In response to the differences seen across Sydney’s residents, several people wrote about flexibility of access – to allow more people to take part. This ranged from different opening hours, either outside working hours or “not just on a Sunday morning”, to *ad hoc* help for the garden or for gardeners who need support (perhaps due to disability). Non-members in particular wrote about wanting to be able to sit in the gardens and some members wrote with pride about ‘co-habitation’ with groups such as local dog walkers (although some garden members did not like dogs on-site due to their waste and destroying gardens or fear of dogs).

“People should be able to sign up to different levels of involvement. One might be just visiting and hanging out in nature and ability to purchase produce. Another maybe someone who looks after a specific plot, another might be people that help and learn from a plot manager.”

3.2.4 Celebrating and showcasing native flora and land use by Aboriginal peoples

When asked about how community gardens could play a greater role in sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and culture about native flora, people wrote about the need for signs, workshops and education, and the planting of native edibles and other plants. There were a lot of people who wrote that while they didn't know how to reach this goal, they were very interested in it.

Several respondents highlighted the need to consult with local Aboriginal peoples and ensure knowledge sharing was appropriate and met their needs. Others talked about needing council support through the provision of plants and signs, or even Council-funded staff to promote this.



Figure 13: Ideas for how community gardens can play a greater role in sharing Aboriginal knowledge and culture – top 20 word frequency (n=241)

There were a minority of respondents who didn't see this as a role for the community gardens. As the survey responses to the role of community gardens show, however, this is both a well-regarded role for community gardens (Figure 6) and a high priority future opportunity (Figure 10).

Several respondents wrote that native flora couldn't be eaten or weren't palatable. There is an opportunity to support community gardens in growing natives and showing how they can be cooked and eaten, particularly as an integrated part of Australia's fusion cuisine tradition.

These responses highlight a high level of interest in attending events or classes where people can learn about native flora and foods.



Image: Charlie's Garden, Darlington.

3.2.5 Community composting

As has been discussed, community composting is very important to people in the City of Sydney. Respondents thought the City had a role in education and awareness about how to reduce food waste and what food products could be composted. Many people saw a move to more widespread composting as needing education and promotion campaigns similar to those used for recycling.

People noted that there was a lot of work managing bins and controlling pests, but there was widespread support for the provision of composting bins for residents. Some respondents were part of the City's composting trial, which was widely supported by those taking part.

“[The City] could provide more information, networking opportunities, and could lobby so that new apartment buildings must include community composting (and old ones too)”

“[The City] has to play a significant role. Composting bins need to be provided and emptied very frequently (particularly in warm weather). Also pest management will have to be improved as once you compile smelling bio-degradable waste in piles, rats, bin chickens and others will have a field day.”

3.3 City of Sydney’s Community Garden Guidelines and Policy

Respondents were asked whether they had referred to the *Community Garden Guidelines*, as well as suggestions or ideas for their improvement.

The *Guidelines* had been referred to by 42% of all respondents, and by 45% of members. Not surprisingly, only 19% of non-members said they had referred to the Guidelines.



Figure 14: Share of respondents who had referred to the guidelines (n=227)

Ideas or suggestions for the *Guidelines* centred around three groups of views:

1. The guidelines were good in their current form
2. There is too much red tape, and the guidelines should be shorter
3. The guidelines are important and need to be strengthened to ensure equitable, open and transparent operations.

While several participants had not read the guidelines or noted it was a long time since they had read them, there was a consistent view among some people that the guidelines be “shorter and simpler”. There was a view that the guidelines needed to be “less bureaucratic” and “not compulsory”. There was a view that the guidelines could become a barrier to participation if they did not take account of vulnerable groups.

“More autonomy - CoS guidelines can be unnecessarily prohibitive.”

There was a group of respondents who thought the *Guidelines* were important to make sure all gardens were operating on the same principles. Among this group there were some who thought Council needed to make sure guidelines were enforced, including making staff available for this function.

When asked about how to make the gardens more inclusive some respondents suggested mandatory aspects for disability accessibility be included in guidelines. Others were opposed to this as against community-development principles and not allowing the flexibility to respond to differing local needs.

“Enforce them ... Not all gardens have Garden Management Plans and it means bullies rise to the top and do what they like. Communities Gardens needs to be supported by a team at the City who ensure meetings are run regularly and fairly, that decision making is transparent and that ‘membership fees’ aren’t collected without any financial reporting mechanism.”

There were comments that the guidelines were useful because they could be used to ensure the City itself met its commitments.

“A little while ago we followed the guidelines but the City changed its plans at quite a late stage and our proposed community garden was severely curtailed in favour of another project. So lots of work for nothing. It would be good if the City stuck to its own guidelines.”

Some of the suggestions for improvement listed by respondents were:

- Breaking up the Guidelines into garden types (small to large) so smaller gardens were not over-burdened
- Expected time frames for the process of establishment/enlargement of gardens. This had not been clear for some respondents when setting up or expanding gardens in the past and creates clear expectations for all participants.
- Greater clarity on funding sources for different components. One respondent noted that the City would fund some establishment costs when preparing budgets and grant applications but this was not clear in the guidelines.
- The need to address conflicting uses of the garden areas.
- Conflict resolution mechanisms or ways to get support for resolving conflicts between members
- Governance guidelines, including how to run elections, make decisions, keep records.

3.4 A snapshot from Waterloo

There was a total of 18 responses from the paper based and electronic responses from the Waterloo Estate Community Garden. Across the questions on the role of community gardens and why people were interested in them, there were similar patterns from Waterloo Estate respondents as other community garden members (see Figures 15 and 16).

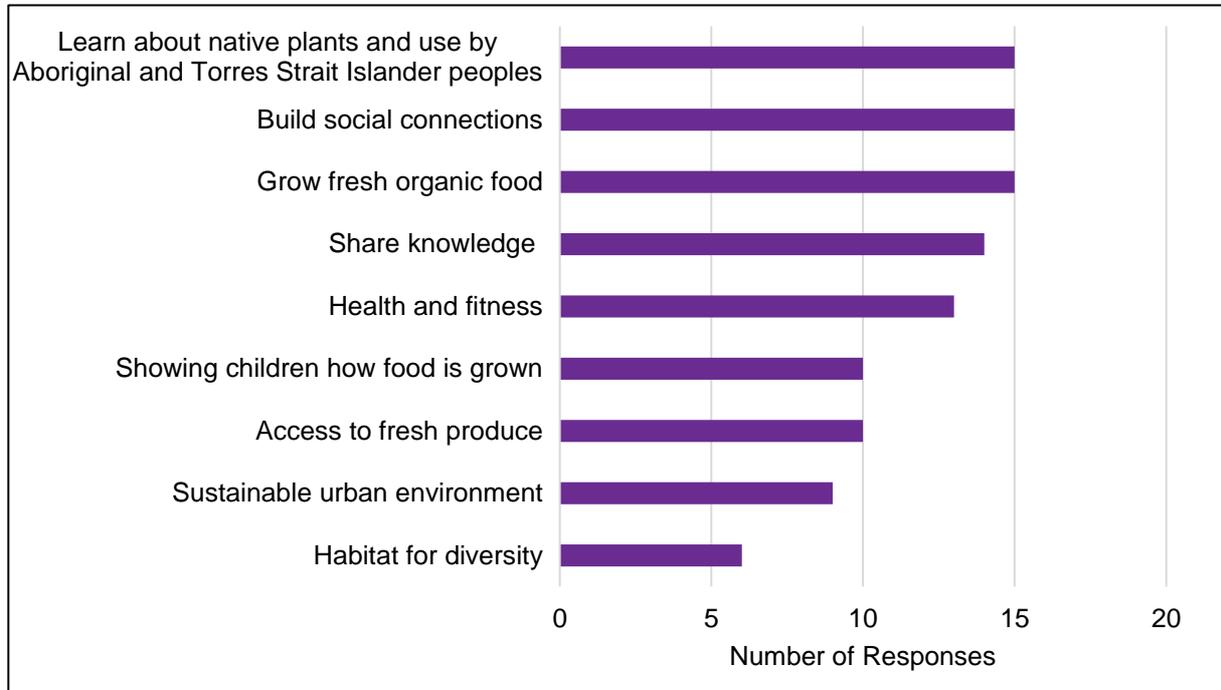


Figure 15: Reasons why community gardens are important in the City of Sydney among Waterloo Estate Community Garden members (n=18)

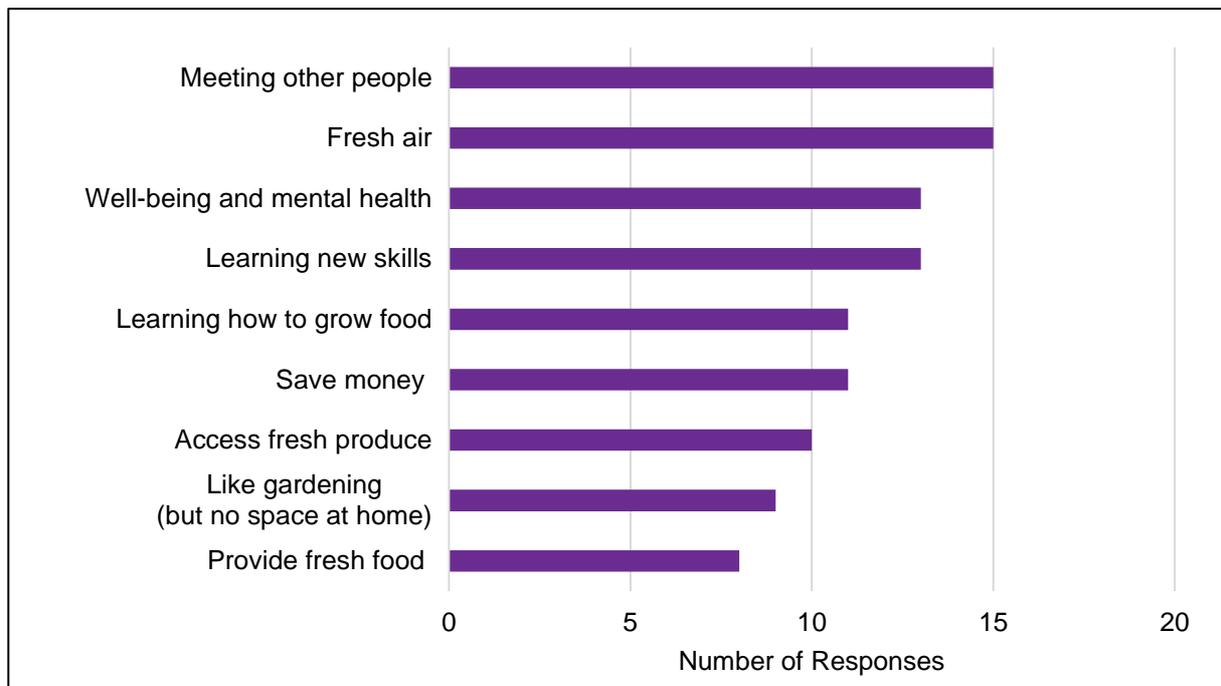


Figure 16: Reasons for an interest in community gardens among Waterloo Estate Community Garden members (n=18)

One of the most notable differences between Waterloo Estate Community Garden members and the larger group of community garden members who took part in the survey was that over half said that their involvement had a significant impact on their access to fresh food. Only two respondents said it had no impact.



Image: The Eden Community Garden at Waterloo

Among the diverse written comments provided by people from Waterloo Estate, there was reinforcement of the ideas raised from across the City of Sydney. The need for more space and bigger gardens was raised, and recognition of the diversity found in the community.

Several people wrote about how important gardening was during COVID-19 to combat loneliness and as a place of relaxation. Although the garden had met during COVID-19, it was more difficult to get people to attend and some gardens had become neglected.

4 Summary

4.1 Five considerations for the Community Gardens Policy Review

These data show that there is widespread support for community gardens, and that there are high expectations on the role of community gardens in supporting more green space across the City of Sydney.

To conclude, we highlight five high-level considerations for the Community Gardens Policy Review.

1: Community gardens play an important social and environmental role in the City

Community gardens were viewed as important across all respondents. Key takeaways include:

- their role in building social connections in local neighbourhoods
- their importance to household/neighbourhood sustainability, with composting singled out as a valuable way to help reduce food waste
- their importance in supporting physical and mental health, through benefits of time with nature and green space
- providing young people with an introduction to how food is grown.

2: Expand community gardens across the City

People who took part in this research were clear about wanting more community gardens (from verge to rooftop gardens) and there was a view that more empty space could be used for these purposes. The need for more access to composting was raised repeatedly with an obvious expectation that community gardens would enable such access.

There was a lot of feedback about having community gardens in all parks and on all footpaths. For people wanting to start small gardens on footpaths the guidelines should include a link to the Footpath Garden Policy and refer to relevant factors such as zoning rules and by-laws that would enable this to take place. It could also be useful to include links or a reference to other City policies that support access to green space, including gardens on private strata titles or parks.

There was also a clear demand for more communication from community gardens in the form of signs, on-line details and via City of Sydney newsletters and communications. Communication was most important for non-members, among whom there was an appetite for new ways to engage with community gardens, supported by flexible opening hours and different ways to be involved. The guidelines could include examples of communication channels and different ways to engage.

3: Share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge about native flora

There was a lot of interest among all respondents (both community garden members and non-members) in learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and culture in relation to native flora. Sharing Aboriginal knowledge was a well-regarded role for community gardens and a high priority future opportunity.

Many respondents emphasised the need to engage with local elders before taking any next steps and there is significant interest in more information via talks, workshops and events, as well as local signs.

Some people noted that natives were not edible and there is an opportunity to showcase how foods were used and continue to be used in new ways.

4: Improve accessibility and remove barriers to participation

There was strong interest in participating among those surveyed who were not members of community gardens.

Communication was one of the important ways respondents thought community gardens could be made more accessible, including having information in different languages. There was also a consistent view that having gardens meet disability guidelines was critical. This included having community gardens with raised garden-beds, flat ground and wide spaces for wheelchairs and walking aids.

Recognising the diversity in each community, from disabilities and language, to different age groups and differing availability of time to commit to a garden was seen as an important step to improving access. Having transparent garden management was seen as one way diverse groups could understand how they could access the gardens, and ensure those running the gardens didn't create unintended barriers to entry.

5: Ensure that the Guidelines set clear governance procedures

There were diverse views about the role of the *Guidelines*, from needing to be simpler on one hand, to setting out explicit expectations and being enforced by Council on the other. Those wanting greater enforcement were largely respondents who reported negative experiences with not being welcomed, or not understanding decision making.

Robust governance of resources and access on public land is a reasonable expectation and does not have to impose onerous tasks on garden members.

