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# GRASSROOTS URBAN BIODIVERSITY CORRIDORS

A citizen empowerment and involvement framework



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## CORE VALUES

- Empowering citizens
- Connecting citizens with local nature
- Bridging social and spatial divides
- Supporting local government efforts in corridor building
- Raising awareness and knowledge around corridors and local fauna and flora



## Phases

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- 1 Planning
- 2 Design
- 3 Training
- 4 Citizen activation



## Who this is for

Organisations, civic groups, or other parties that have networks of active, interested citizens but who don't yet know how to strategically or technically convert their energy into effective ecological restoration.

This framework is specifically developed to help these groups become effective and strategic ecological restoration activists. I have seen many groups try to engage in restoration gardening, but there are many pitfalls that might hinder these efforts. This framework helps prevent these pitfalls, and it allows for kickstarting a much more strategic, well-planned and professionally guided process.

These are some of the pitfalls that often arise:

- Lacking a way to direct well-meaning enthusiasts towards the right activities that add to the project, rather than distract from it. A lot of time can get wasted on managing volunteers who want to do European-style gardening, for example (education in combination with providing planning tools are key in changing this).
- Having big dreams without catering to many ways of getting involved: some have time and strength, but little money, some have money but little time (target training for gardeners, make plant packages that are easy to buy and are delivered, link with landscapers that can cater to high-end and low-end designs and offer turn-key solutions).
- Having big dreams without the marketing reach to the specific part of the public that have the time, interest, physical strength, and ability to commit to this kind of work.
- Starting restoration patches and gardens without people to care for and maintain them in the first year – many plants will die in the drier months of their first year.
- Planting a lot of bush in public space without a maintenance plan – they will be mowed by local members of the public or the city if they become places for criminals to hide, or where trash collects.
- Creating restoration patches / gardens that are not clearly demarcated for mowers – they will be mowed down, or walked on, before the baseline layer of plants is established.
- Leaving weeds and branches behind – they become a dumping site.
- Starting with big dreams but without making a detailed plan to coordinate the many parties needed to pull it off.
- Starting without agreeing on an approach to plant selection.
- Exciting the public without a clear next step for them, where they can find eco-sourced plants and find step-by-step instructions for beginners.
- Have a funding model to expand and continue running this programme (e.g. the website has some paid services, the training programme offers paid and sponsored training, the plants sales bring in money).

# Introduction

This is a summary of a framework developed by Frances Taylor. I am an ecological corridor architect with over 8 years experience in urban ecological restoration and corridor building. This framework is based on the work I have done in different cities in South Africa, and I am available as a project lead to roll this out in other cities and countries. However, it is important to note that this project is imagined with a number of local collaborators in mind (more on this below).

The goal of this work is to provide the tools and local capacity to kickstart a citizen movement where urban residents get involved in local ecological restoration. This is done by extending local governmental conservation areas by incorporating community gardens, local parks, and private gardens by planting them with locally-appropriate, indigenous vegetation. Each of these gardens thereby link as a stepping-stone into the existing ecological corridor. This has proven to be a highly effective way of getting local residents excited about planting and maintaining private and public spaces with appropriate plant species, especially when running campaigns around charismatic local animal species (flagship species) that many residents are keen to support. By training and mobilising citizens, these efforts could lead to both more citizen involvement and also an enhanced, enlarged ecological corridor in the city.

In order for this project to be successfully rolled out, I suggest that three different groups come together:

## IGNITION TEAM

**Tasks:** to plan and design the corridor strategy, and train and activate the local stakeholders

**Involvement:** limited to the initial phase of the project

Suggested composition:

- Project lead
- Local ecologist and botanist
- Landscape architect
- Graphic designer
- Public engagement specialist
- Marketing specialist

## **HOST ORGANISATION**

**Tasks:** to provide coordination and guidance to the stakeholder network

**Involvement:** continuous, from the initial phase onward

The host organisation could be the project funder or another key player in the city who is keen to provide an institutional home for this project. It is suggested that a bigger coalition of partners is built (more on this below) as part of the process. The role of the host organisation is to provide coordination and guidance for this project, and to be one of the founding partners in this project (the other founding partners would be the other organisations in the coalition). The host organisation should have a strong interest in strengthening local ecological corridors, it should have the ability to either directly reach local residents or be able to do so through partners, and it should have capacity and interest in being a leader in this civic urban greening initiative.

## **STAKEHOLDER COALITION**

**Tasks:** to engage local residents in strategic urban greening, in alignment with the strategic vision developed and co-designed through this framework

**Involvement:** preferably continuous and starting at some point during the planning process, but could also be incidental and some partners might join later on

This coalition is formed by a diverse group of interested parties that want to be involved in this work. A key objective is that this coalition develops an operating team to liaise and organise the multiple groups with diverse backgrounds and interests around a joint vision. Examples of groups that might get involved include:

- Environmental groups: bird club, insect group, gardening groups, botanical gardens, etc.
- Social groups: walking groups, exercise groups, church groups, art groups, neighbouring adopt-a-park groups etc.
- Education related groups: schools, environmental education centres, etc.
- Organisations associated with gardening activities: landscaping companies, nurseries, etc.

The activities described in the following chapters allow for a robust, well-planned, and professionally executed start of civic engagement around urban greening. This framework contemplates creating the required planning, knowledge, design, training, and activation tools that allow residents to get involved in greening. However, this project expects that the stakeholder coalition, with support of the host organisation, will take all these inputs and tools and use these to take these strategic, participatory greening efforts to local residents.

These activities are expected to be executed primarily by the Ignition Team. The Host Organisation is expected to help connect the team to relevant people and potential partner organisations. The Stakeholder Coalition will be supported in starting up their activities as part of these activities.

Below is a summary description of the four parts of the framework: **1. Planning, 2. Design, 3. Training and 4. Citizen Activation.** The Ignition Team can be partially or fully involved in these kinds of activities, with the extent of our involvement tailored to expertise already available. There is more to the process than these phases, such as programme setup, maintenance planning, long-term funding planning, and monitoring programme development. What we offer is the launchpad of the longer process that helps shape the process and to avoid common pitfalls. Other activities and aspects not described below can be developed in parallel.

PHASE 1

# Planning



## Partners

- Local biodiversity groups (e.g. insect societies, bird groups, nature based art groups, citizen scientist groups)
- Local government (e.g. biodiversity departments, public open space departments)
- Local universities or research groups (e.g. botanical gardens, environment departments)

## Description

The first step is to establish key partnerships with local groups that have an interest and experience in relevant areas. This work will build off existing efforts and strategies to ensure that this will strengthen what is already happening and be a complementary enhancement. The first phase has the following objectives:

- To set up a network of partners that are keen to get involved in any of the phases of this project and to understand their needs, goals, and priorities
- To identify existing urban greening initiatives, corridor strategies, and other relevant public or private efforts around urban greening and ecological restoration
- To identify locally-specific objectives of citizens and their involvement in urban ecological restoration
- To identify indicator species and flagship species (be it flora or fauna) that are charismatic and that can be used to build campaigns around.
- To identify key areas within the city that are considered high-priority intervention areas for this project

At the end of the planning phase, a Citizen Biodiversity Corridor Plan will be written that summarises the outcomes of the different objectives outlined above. The plan will include relevant maps and details on what areas, plant and animal species, and target audiences are primarily targeted by this project. It will be a document that serves as a guideline throughout the work, it ensures that all partners are on the same page, and that new partners can validate their involvement by making sure their interests align with the objectives of this corridor plan.

PHASE 2

# Design



## Partners

- Landscape architects
- Botanists
- Entomologists

## Description

This phase looks at designing the corridor at two different levels: at the city level, and at garden level. These designs focus on accessibility: the goal is not to be as detailed or as complex as possible, but the goal is to ensure that local citizens can look at these designs and understand what this project is doing and they can easily envision what their role in it can be.

### City-level corridor design

Based on existing corridor plans, key target areas, existing greening initiatives, and the identified objectives, a detailed corridor design will be developed which combines all these inputs in order to create a corridor design for urban citizens. This is primarily a mapping exercise that shows in which areas it is best to focus citizen efforts. The maps will show how these gardens connect with existing remnants and corridors. The corridor design will take into account what types of citizen gardens are most likely to be set up in different areas (ranging from household gardens, balcony gardens, walkway gardens, public space gardens, etc).

### Garden typology designs

Based on the corridor plans for the city, a number of garden typologies will be defined. Each typology is a generic representation of a specific garden type (such as a domestic garden, balcony garden, wetland garden, or roadside garden). Garden typologies can also be based on their functionality/targets (such as a butterfly garden, a chameleon-friendly garden, a medicinal garden). The garden typologies will be based on commonly identified types and opportunities in the city, in collaboration with the partners and their objectives, and they will try to provide people with clear instructions and inspiration that helps them envision what a stepping-stone garden could look like for their particular case. The designs will include the following:

- Landscape design that shows recommended key elements and features in the garden
- Recommended plant species (with their motivations) as well as suggested ways of grouping them
- Phased planting recommendations (for year 1-5)
- Overview of key requirements and expected challenges for this particular garden type

PHASE 3

# Training



## Partners

Local biodiversity groups (e.g. insect societies, bird groups, citizen scientist groups)

## Description

Different training programmes can be developed, depending on the network of the partner organisation and the audience interest and profile. However, the primary goal is to provide education on local ecological restoration so that residents get a solid understanding of:

- What ecological restoration entails
- The reason why ecological restoration is valuable and important in their urban context
- How they can make a strategic contribution to the greening in their city
- Practical steps required to plan for and develop a stepping-stone garden
- Maintenance of a garden - a key piece of the training course to ensure that people don't only focus on setting up a garden, but are also concerned about long-term maintenance of it

The training can be geared towards the end users, but it can also target future trainers (a 'train the trainers' programme).

Depending on the expected roll-out, training can be shaped in any of the following formats:

- A one-day workshop
- A short course that runs for 4 sessions over a month
- An online, live course
- A recorded course, that is self-paced and can be done by residents at any time from their own home

PHASE 4

# Citizen activation



## Partners

- Local biodiversity groups (e.g. insect societies, bird groups, citizen scientist groups)
- Local government
- Local non-profits
- Communication/social media specialists

## Description

This part is concerned with the actual engagement of citizens around this project. It is a fundamental part of making things work. Without active engagement, all these efforts would be in vain. For this reason, it is recommended that in the planning phase there is already a discussion on which partners have a network that can be leveraged to reach a local audience. There might also be additional partners, social networks or groups that can be brought in specifically in this phase.

The different 'products' used in this marketing campaign include all the elements developed in the previous phases: the master plan, corridor and garden design, and the training course(s) that are available. However, all of these pieces of knowledge are packaged in a single platform that is central in the citizen activation project: an online web portal where people can visualise the urban corridor network, where they can see existing gardens, add their own gardens to it, easily create locally-specific reports and instructions on what and how to plant for their specific requirements and location, and connect with other gardeners in the area.

Alongside the online platform, a 3-year activation plan will be developed. This plan looks at a phased approach to bringing people on board, starting gardens, and maintaining them. It looks at the flagship species that were chosen in the first phase, and suggests specifically timed campaigns around them (based on seasonality and location). The activation plan is made so that different organisations can choose to come on board either for specific periods or campaigns, or they can join these efforts for the entire period, depending on their capacity and interest. Marketing materials and event templates are made available to all partners, in order to help with the structure of campaigns. All founding partners will be featured prominently on the online platform, and might receive additional coverage in return, depending on the chosen collaboration/support structure.

It is suggested that a designated team from within the Stakeholder Coalition oversees the activation efforts and the management of the online platform. Tools will be available to send newsletters, post media to social media, and manage the citizen gardens that are created by local residents. It is recommended that this team sets up some media channels that are used for communicating with local residents (and the rest of the world), for instance through Facebook, Instagram, and/or Whatsapp groups.

## Time Estimates

The table below indicates the number of days of work it would take for the Ignition Team to develop the four phases described above. The "minimum", "medium", and "maximum" time estimates provide ranges for different levels of engagement. Each of these project estimates is built around delivering a well-rounded, professional, and highly useful set of tools, training, and materials for building functional urban ecological corridors. The main difference is in the level of detail, coverage area, and size of the project itself.

Time estimates can be refined once an exact scope of the work (and potential in-house capacity) have been discussed.

	PHASE	Min days	Med days	Max days
1	Planning	14	25	38
2	Design	33	49	65
3	Training	26	37	48
4	Citizen activation	39	52	65
		<b>112</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>216</b>

# M O R E I N F O R M A T I O N

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