

# Top Ten Tools

## For The Sustainable Neighborhood Small Grant Competition

The following ideas are meant to be conversation starters. There is no requirement or extra credit for utilizing any of these techniques in the small grant competition; they are simply to serve as a resource when contemplating example sustainable neighborhood project ideas. These examples, and other sustainability ideas that are often good fits at the neighborhood scale, will be included as part of a much more detailed Sustainable Neighborhood Toolkit that will be available in the Fall of 2013. In addition to identifying the “top ten” tools, this document suggests possible ways to combine them with other tools for a potentially greater impact.

### How Do I Green My Neighborhood and Make it Healthier?

Greening your neighborhood can include projects at all scales to create a healthier environment, healthier people, and a healthier economy. A healthy environment will mean less local pollution for residents, so you can breathe cleaner air, have healthier water, and have better access to green and natural spaces. Improved access to green spaces allows residents to be more active, more social, and have more interaction with the natural environment. Better environmental quality can bring improvements in property values, better chances for local investment, and even opportunities for growing new businesses around green practices.

- I. Create a Community Garden or Local Food Installation** for access to fresh healthy fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers. *[Combine with: Create a Naturescaping Program and Installation; Create Public Seating or Street Furniture; Create a Recycling Challenge or Composting Program; DePave a Parking Lot or Driveway; Create a Shop Local/Green Business Campaign]*

#### **Getting Started:**

1. Organize interested neighbors and create a planning committee for your new garden or installation. Resources for how to create a community garden in St. Louis include the Missouri Botanical Gardens, American Community Gardening Association, the EPA, Missouri Extension, and Gateway Greening.
2. Find and secure a site for your garden or installation. Consider who owns the land, the cleanliness and soil, and access to sunlight and water.
3. Identify cost needs for your garden or installation including design and construction, site clean-up, tools, a water source, equipment, plants, and seeds. Information about getting additional funding, tools, learning materials, plants, or seeds is at Gateway Greening, Missouri Botanical Garden, and Rebel Tomato.
4. Design and plan the garden. Accommodate children, the elderly, and people all abilities. Tips can be found through Missouri Extension.
5. Organize members and decide how many plots are available, how they will be assigned, and how the garden will be managed overall. Create clear Gardener Guidelines. Look at Missouri Extension for a good list of issues to consider.
6. Build the garden or installation over a few regularly scheduled workdays.

**II. Create a Naturescaping Program and Installation** with native plants that support wildlife habitat and native landscapes for birds, bees, and butterflies that create biodiversity and can support native food processes. *[Combine with: DePave a Parking Lot or Driveway; Create a Community Garden or Local Food Installation; Create a Rain Garden or Bioswale]*

**Getting Started:**

1. Design the naturescape with a group of interested residents. Helpful organizations for resources are Gateway Greening, Brightside St. Louis, PAUSE St. Louis Zoo, the EPA, and Wild Ones. For information about native plants and animals visit Missouri Botanical Garden, Grow Native!, Missouri Department of Conservation, St. Louis Audubon Society, and Powder Valley Conservation Center.
2. If working on private property like a home, business, or school, try to place the native garden where it can be seen so the whole neighborhood can enjoy, learn, and benefit from it.
3. If working on public property, such as a park or LRA owned lot, coordinate with the Parks Department of the St. Louis. Certain LRA-owned properties can be leased for a small fee.
4. Create a detailed outline of the naturescaping Program and how it will function over the long term. Consider who will manage the program. Have a long term vision and goal for the program that is inclusive of the entire community.
5. Organize workdays to build the naturescape. Host your workday(s). Gather tools and resources and assign tasks to your volunteers and build your naturescape.
6. Plan for maintenance and upkeep to make sure your plants are flourishing.

**How Do I Make My Neighborhood Safer and Build a Stronger Community?**

Various physical and programming projects can help build a stronger, safer community. Physically safe neighborhoods and strong, active communities go hand in hand to create great places to live, so it's important to combine physical improvements with social programs that support those improvements. Well-designed public spaces such as parks, parklets, playgrounds, and even creative seating areas and bus stops can contribute to safety and strong communities, and the act of creating those places as a community will build solidarity, consensus, and friendship within your neighborhood. Better public spaces and neighborhood participation can start neighborhoods on the path of revitalization and growth for healthier and more prosperous lives for current and new residents and businesses.

**III. Calm Traffic and Improve Intersection Safety** for pedestrian, bicycle, and overall resident safety. *[Combine with: Create a Bike Hub; Create a Recycling Challenge or Composting Program; Create Rain Gardens or Bioswales]*

**Getting Started:**

1. Work with interested neighbors, NSOs, your neighborhood association, and Alderperson to discuss feasible ideas and previous work.
2. Brainstorm strategies that you think would calm traffic and improve intersections, possibly including a combination of the following: speed bumps, narrowed streets, stop signs, parallel or angled parking, brightly painted crosswalks or intersection murals, median strips, bike lanes, speed table crosswalks, pedestrian lighting at crosswalks, various landscaping and street trees, and curbs extended into the intersection to make crosswalks shorter

(bumpouts). These methods come from a variety of resources including Project for Public Spaces Rightsizing Streets; The Great Neighborhood Book, and Road Diets.

3. In many cases, before permanent construction is an option, communities test their safety strategies by temporarily painting the street to match what the real traffic patterns would be.
4. To gain support, create detailed drawings and plans for your street modifications. Use these in publications, discussions, and meetings to get feedback and support from the community.
5. St. Louis City Streets Department and Board of Public Service will have to approve your project. Coordinate with them to ensure that you have the proper permissions to proceed with installation. Coordinate with your alderperson or neighborhood association for these negotiations. St. Louis does offer the '50/50 Sidewalk Program' to fund sidewalk repairs.
6. If you are organizing permanent and temporary construction, the permanent construction - redoing the curbs and ADA curb cuts at an intersection, for example - will be scheduled with the City and should be completed before any temporary installations.
7. Once you have approval, appropriate permits and permanent construction is complete, plan your installation day. Organize volunteers, tasks, tools, and equipment.

**IV. Secure and Preserve Vacant or Historic Buildings** for improved neighborhood safety, historic preservation, and improved neighborhood appearance. [*Combine with: Create a Public Input Campaign, Create a Community Art Installation*]

**Getting Started:**

1. Engage your Neighborhood Stabilization Office and the St. Louis Problem Properties Task Force - led by City attorneys, the program goes after owners of run-down properties, or properties with a lot of nuisance crimes.
2. Create public art for abandoned buildings to bring attention to the conditions, beautify the neighborhood, address buildings safety issues, preserve buildings for later rehab, and engage the public. Painting buildings or is a common strategy.
3. Do-It-Yourself Blight Busting – gather local volunteers to clean up vacant properties. Remove very hazardous parts of the building, board up windows and doors, remove debris on the lawn, and trim the landscape.
4. Create a Public Input Campaign or Installation that gathers public input about the future of the building or neighborhood while also securing or increasing safety on the vacant property.
5. Begin the process of historic preservation in your neighborhood. Engage your local neighborhood association, the Cultural Resources Office and Preservation Research Office.
6. Collaborate with Cultural Resources Office, Preservation Research Office, Local Art and Community Building Programs such as Rebuild Foundation, Community Builders Network, UMSL Community Partnership Project, and Kresge Foundation, to find resources for stopping brick theft in your neighborhood and support for creative endeavors in community preservation and community arts.

7. Create a community group to catalog vacant, historic or properties available for redevelopment.
8. Create a guided or self-guided walking tour of historic structures or introduce historic preservation curriculum in schools/after school programs.
9. Teach historic building rehab/design build. Bring together community organizations, businesses, arts and community foundations, youth training programs, and local vocational schools and universities to offer classes teaching construction, electricity, home rehab, architecture, design, construction, historic preservation, design rehab, etc.

## How Do I Encourage Walking and Biking in My Neighborhood?

Improving walkability and bikeability in your neighborhood are essential to creating a healthier environment, healthier people and can even help create a better local economy. Walkable and bikeable neighborhoods are in high demand and have more stable and even rising property values compared to car-dependent neighborhoods. Giving people more and safer opportunities to walk and ride to local destinations encourages daily physical activity leading to healthier lifestyles, improved physical health, and equal accessibility to daily needs, especially for kids and seniors. More trips made on foot and bicycle reduces the number of cars on the road, which improves the safety for walkers and bikers, reduces greenhouse gases, and limits pollution from automobiles. Even small scale walking and biking projects can bring about greater changes to your neighborhood, both physically and culturally, to move toward larger acceptance of walking and biking as acceptable and even better modes of daily transportation.

- V. Create a Bike Hub** with learning facilities, repair station, bike storage, bike swap, and more for greater access and bikeability in your community. [*Combine with: Calm Traffic and Improve Intersection Safety; Create Public Seating or Street Furniture;*]

### Getting Started:

1. Work with your local neighborhood association, Great Rivers Greenway District, or Trailnet. They can put you in touch with local experts and other interested neighbors, give you a space to meet, and give you guidance about working with the community.
2. Create a clear plan for your bike hub. Some major things to consider are:
  - a. Will it will be a building, or a pavilion, or a series of smaller repair stations around the neighborhood?
  - b. Can you partner with a local institution, school, business, church, park, or other organization to create a bike hub in or at an existing building?
  - c. How will it be publicly accessible? Will it be on privately owned land or in an existing building? Will it be in a park or on a sidewalk or on a vacant lot?
  - d. How will it be managed? Who is in charge of maintenance, stocking, scheduling, etc?
  - e. Will it be staffed? Will volunteers donate time like a bike co-op? Or is it stand-alone and just available for public use anytime like a bike repair stand?
  - f. Will there be educational programming, training, or organized events/rides? Think about working with a local bike shop or organization to create programming.
3. Review the regional Gateway Bike Plan to see which locations in your neighborhood are accessible by bike routes.
4. If creating a building, work with an architect or designer. Try to get services donated from a neighbor, a local design firm, cycling organization, or design school students.

5. If installing on a sidewalk, median, plaza, or other public location, work with the City of St. Louis Board of Public Service and Streets Departments to get permission and regulations about locations, public safety, and installation requirements.
6. Create a name for your bike hub, distribute information, and communicate with users, via website, social media or use other local resources such as the Trailnet or GRG website.
7. Calculate the complete cost and assess if you need to raise more funding or get donations from other sources.
8. Create a timeline for construction/installation, set up work days, and organize tools and volunteers. Order all materials in advance and plan for safety and timely construction.

## How Do I Clean Up My Neighborhood and Make it More Attractive?

There are numerous benefits that come from simple clean-up and beautification projects in your neighborhood. Cleaner and more beautiful physical environments give a better impression of your neighborhood, showing current residents and visitors that people are invested in their community and care about the quality of life there. Gathering neighbors together to participate in ongoing neighborhood clean-up, beautification, and maintenance projects builds camaraderie and friendship that can build stronger and more invested communities, which encourages long term stability and sustainability. Small improvements such as clean streets; maintained buildings, lawns, sidewalks, and parks; decorative landscaping; and improved waste management like recycling and composting can be uniting programs to bring the community together for a greater cause. These programs can also lead to larger improvements in public and private infrastructure, spurring a larger movement toward neighborhood improvement, both in the environment, the public sector, and the private sector.

**VI. Create a Recycling Challenge or Composting Program** to build sustainable waste practices. *[Combine with: Create a Bike Hub; DePave a Parking Lot or Driveway; Create a Community Garden or Local Food Installation; Create a Naturescaping Program; Create a Neighborhood Energy Challenge]*

### **Getting Started:**

#### **A. Recycling**

1. The City of St. Louis has a single stream residential recycling program in every ward. If you do not have individual recycle bins or collective containers in your neighborhood, contact your alderperson to request more recycling services.
2. Encourage recycling by hosting a neighborhood recycling challenge. You can use promotional materials, meetings, presentations, advertisements, public art, block competitions, and special events to do this.
3. Replace trash cans on your block and in your neighborhood with recycle bins. This will require a different service to empty those recycle bins, or your neighborhood can organize a group of volunteers to empty the bins on a regular basis into the larger alley recycle bins. Contacting the City about getting involved in this program.

#### **B. Composting**

1. The City of St. Louis does not have a citywide composting program, so neighborhoods are an ideal place to achieve composting.

2. Decide how big the compost bin should be, where it will be located, and what the compost will be used for. Many neighborhoods partner compost bins with community gardens as a source for soil and fertilizer.
3. Design the compost bin. Some examples can be found at Missouri Botanical Garden, Earth Easy, House of Love, and This Old House. If you need to, communicate rules, hours, or procedure with an informational sign.
4. Determine who will help maintain the compost bin. The pile will need to be turned at least once every 2 weeks. It can be scheduled with a bulletin board or email list that is organized with the compost bin design. Make sure you have regular contributors to your compost bin.

## How Do I Reduce Flooding and Improve Water Quality in My Neighborhood?

St. Louis has a long history of being deeply connected to its water systems, particularly to the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. More than many places, St. Louis neighborhoods experience our connection to our water system daily when dealing with issues such as sewer and stormwater management, stormwater runoff, flooding, water quality, and access to clean water. Many neighborhoods understand that current development and building patterns don't always allow for healthy local water systems, so it is the passion of many neighborhoods to begin making physical changes to improve their local water systems and alleviate some of the communities concerns. Projects that transform the built environment to reduce runoff, manage stormwater, improve water quality, and limit flooding and sewer overflow are important for improving the environmental health of the community, preserving access to clean water for residents, and for a creating more stable and predictable place for homeowners and businesses to invest. These projects can be just the first steps to inspire neighbors to create a larger movement toward a healthy water neighborhood.

**VII. DePave a Parking Lot** to reduce runoff, reduce urban heat island effect, reduce air pollution, and create new green and/or public space. *[Combine with: Create Rain Gardens or Bioswales; Create a Recycling Challenge or Composting Program; Create a Bike Hub; Create Public Seating or Street Furniture; Create a Community Garden or Local Food Installation; Create a Naturescaping Program and Installation]*

### **Getting Started:**

1. DePave, a non-profit organization in Portland, Oregon, is the pioneer for this type of project and their website offers extensive information and resources about why and how to depave a parking lot. Research their website and their how-to guide for completing this kind of project.
2. Select a site to depave. If you have a vacant site in mind, you'll need to contact the St. Louis LRA about doing any kind of work on the property. Research the history of the site and test the soil, which will have to be done by a soil testing lab.
3. Create a vision for the future of the greenspace and create a detailed site plan. Some ideas include community gardens, rain gardens, bioswales, trees and planters, and even alternative permeable pavements.
4. During construction, you will need permits from the city, so contact the City's Building Permits Division and/or the Demolition Permits Division.



5. Before beginning construction, carefully organize your workday participants and volunteers. Make sure everyone has a role, everyone is using proper safety equipment, and you have the proper scale of demolition and construction equipment. Before you dig, call the Missouri One Call System to have them located underground utility lines.
6. Recycle your demolition materials. Concrete can be reused and asphalt can be recycled.
7. After depaving, prepare the soil for planting. This may require removing or replacing some of the soil to restore it to better conditions.
8. Then plants can be planted and you can begin using your new community green space.

**VIII. Create Rain Gardens or Bioswales for reduced runoff and sustainable native plants.**  
*[Combine with: DePave a Parking Lot or Driveway; Create a Community Garden or Local Food Installation; Create a Naturescaping Program and Installation]*

**Getting Started:**

1. Work closely with your interested neighbors, your neighborhood organization, and alderperson to discuss feasible ideas and any previously work.
2. Brainstorm possible locations for rain gardens or bioswales to see which property owners, streets, intersections, or sites would be most appropriate. If working in the public right of way, coordinate with Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD), St. Louis Board of Public Service, and the City Streets Department.
3. Design your rain garden or bioswale using best practices standards. Understand the design requirements for your rain garden or bioswale and work within those guidelines to achieve the best project for your community. Many how-to guides, plant and design recommendations are available through MSD, Missouri Botanical Garden.
4. Price your project to understand installation costs. If more funding is needed, research various resources and organizations.
5. Once your design is complete, get the proper permissions and permits necessary for construction, and get the design approved by your neighborhood association.
6. Order plant and construction materials in time for a scheduled installation day.
7. Host an installation workday with volunteers to help construct the rain garden.

## **How Can I Conserve Energy in My Neighborhood?**

Reducing energy usage is one of the most influential ways to create a more sustainable community. It's often quite difficult to understand the impacts of our daily behaviors on energy use because there is no easy way to see how much or what kind of energy we are using or the impacts of burning that energy. A great challenge of neighborhood energy projects is getting residents and business-owners to understand the connection between changes in their behavior and actual impacts on the environment, the economy, and the community. But it is important to understand that using less energy in buildings means not only lower energy bills, but less burning of coal, which in turn leads to improved air quality, less water use, and less energy waste. Creative neighborhood scale projects are a great way to get more individuals and households committed to reducing their energy use and the more participants commit and communicate with their neighbors, the greater impact one neighborhood can have on energy use reduction.

**IX. Create a Neighborhood Energy Challenge** to reduce neighborhood energy use. *[Combine with: Create a Recycling Challenge or Composting Program; Create a Community Garden of Local Food Installation; Create a Public Input Campaign]*

**Getting Started:**

1. Research energy challenges and tips from the EPA. Gather ideas for how to run a successful neighborhood energy challenge, and decide which tactics are best for your community.
2. Things to consider for creating your energy challenge are:
  - a. How are participants organized? For this scale, organizing by block, street, school, or small group of households or businesses is best. Remember that homeowners, business owners, renters, schools, and even corporations can participate in the challenge!
  - b. What kind of commitment do participants make? You can have residents sign a pledge.
  - c. What is the energy reduction goal? Many neighborhoods try to reduce energy use by 10%
  - d. How will you track energy use? Participants will have to record energy use and bills over time. Find a creative way to make household changes/updates and energy records be visible or easily accessible, possibly with a public display board of ongoing progress.
  - e. Is there a time frame for reaching your goal?
  - f. What incentives will you provide to encourage participation
  - g. What will the grant money fund? The best uses are to create a resource guide for residents to improve their homes, host a series of helpful workshops of hands-on how to training sessions for simple home repairs, weatherization, and doing home energy audits; helping fund home energy audits; and most importantly creating a public competition display or announcement forum that is easily visible in the community.
3. Make information available to challenge participants and possibly have representatives from these organizations host workshops for challenge participants. For Home weatherization, see Urban League, Laclede Gas, Ameren, Rebuilding Together St. Louis, and the MO Department of Natural Resources.
4. For home energy audits, you may be able to negotiate group rates, get tax reductions, get support, or train local resident volunteers on how to do home energy audits for the neighborhood. Work with local utility companies: Ameren, Laclede Gas.
5. Create a publicly visible and accessible component to the challenge. Information, energy statistic updates, progress and other information is usually hard to understand because energy is often invisible, so work with creative local residents and possibly use an art installation to convey your information. Track and document neighborhood progress, celebrate the end of the challenge, and reward the winners with prizes for their energy saving efforts.

## **How Can I Bring Vitality Through Business To My Neighborhood?**

Creating invested and active communities is one the most valuable outcomes of neighborhood sustainability projects. Building capacity with residents, business owners, community organizations and institutions will give your neighborhood the human capital and resources to complete the projects and programs that you feel passionate about. Building on your neighborhoods unique identity is an essential



way for you to make your mark in the city of St. Louis and in the greater region, and gathering a community that will work together to make change is an invaluable way to start the positive transformation you want in your neighborhood. Creative projects, public engagement activities, and unique organizing ideas or events can be just what a community needs to start the conversation about environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

- X. Create a Shop Local/Green Business Campaign** to support local businesses, help them go green, and bring sustainable practices to your favorite local shops and businesses. *[Combine with: Create a Neighborhood Energy Challenge; Create a Community Garden or Local Food Installation]*

**Getting Started:**

1. Create a group and set a date for a kick-off event and initial goals. The kick-off event could be a press conference to announce or an event to sell/give away campaign material. Or you could hold a gathering for business owners, perhaps at a local restaurant or venue.
2. Devise a name, slogan, and logo. It should be positive and proactive, and your logo professionally designed. Consider asking local designers to volunteer their services in exchange for free membership. Examples of slogans and logos can be found online, but it is best to be creative and highlight the unique things about your community.
3. Develop a campaign kit of materials that businesses receive when they join. It could include a welcome letter, a window decal of the campaign logo for their storefront, tips for promoting the campaign, a “Top 10 Reasons to Support Locally Owned Businesses” flyer for distributing to customers, frequently asked questions about the campaign, a list of participating businesses, and a poster. Create a basic web site.
4. There are various types of campaigns including the traditional one defined above. Other creative ideas are:
  - a. Have residents pledge to spend \$10 a week on local food
  - b. Offer discounts or benefits for local residents
  - c. Offer discounts/benefits for people that walk or ride bikes
  - d. Create a business recycling challenge
  - e. Create a local product or shop guide.
  - f. Neighborhood groups advertising local business with a Mailer /map/flyer
  - g. Encourage bike delivery/courier service
  - h. Local food/farmers market/restaurant partnership program
  - i. Host a buy local day or week-long event
5. Define membership and determine which businesses are eligible to participate in the campaign. Contact American Independent Business Alliance for examples of how other buy local efforts define “locally owned” and “independent.” Decide how much it will cost businesses to join.
6. Recruit members by inviting businesses to join the campaign. Check with the St. Louis Regional Chamber for local business contact information.