

Growing Community

Strategic Programming for Social and Financial Value

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Executive Summary

In communities facing food insecurity, health disparities, and limited access to fresh food, nonprofit organizations are challenged to deliver impact while sustaining operations. To address these intersecting challenges, I partnered with a Boston-based urban agriculture nonprofit to design a 10-part “Food as Medicine” workshop series that strengthens intergenerational engagement, expands access to health-focused education, and introduces a pathway toward earned revenue.

Through stakeholder outreach and senior-focused research, the series integrates hands-on learning, local partnerships, and iterative feedback to ensure relevance and accessibility. The result is a scalable, mission-aligned model that delivers social, educational, and organizational value, supporting both immediate community impact and long-term financial sustainability.

Organizational Context

Based in Boston, this urban agriculture nonprofit transforms local spaces into access points for food, education, and community connection. Its work addresses climate resilience, public health, and equitable food systems. Like many mission-driven organizations, it faces the ongoing pressure of sustaining impact while navigating financial uncertainty.

Problem & Opportunity

The organization operates within a community facing overlapping challenges, including food insecurity, environmental inequities, and economic instability, disproportionately affecting low-income residents and communities of color. While programming has effectively engaged younger audiences, gaps emerged:

- Older adults were not meaningfully reached
- Intergenerational engagement opportunities were limited
- Substantial reliance on grants constrained long-term sustainability

At the same time, there was a clear opportunity to:

- Expand into health-focused, community-relevant programming
- Build partnerships with healthcare and senior-serving organizations
- Introduce mission-aligned earned revenue streams

Approach

Organizational Assessment

I conducted a comprehensive review of:

- Program reach and community engagement
- Revenue structure and funding dependencies
- Historical tax data
- Alignment between mission and operations

This analysis helped me to identify strategic areas and opportunities for growth.

Stakeholder Engagement

I collaborated with:

- Senior care facilities
- Healthcare professionals, including doctors and nurses
- Local residents, with a focus on older adults

These conversations were conducted to uncover insights around accessibility, preventative health interests, and barriers to participation.

Community Research & Iteration

To ensure relevance and usability, I:

- Interviewed local residents
- Assembled a senior-focused group to gather ongoing feedback
- Incorporated iterative input into program design and refinement

This process allowed the program to evolve in response to participant experience rather than assumptions.

Strategy: Food as Medicine Workshop Series

This work culminated in the design of a 10-part “Food as Medicine” workshop series developed in collaboration with the organization to connect food, health, and community through accessible, hands-on learning.

The series was designed to:

- Function as both standalone workshops and a cohesive series
- Be accessible to participants with varying levels of experience and income
- Incorporate guest speakers and community partners
- Emphasize experiential, applied learning

At a strategic level, the series reframes food as a tool for prevention, connection, and empowerment while aligning with the organization's mission and community needs.

Implementation & Program Design

Each workshop follows a consistent structure to support clarity and learning:

- Introduction & Context – Grounding the topic in everyday relevance
- Expert Insight – Guest speakers provide subject-matter expertise
- Hands-On Learning – Participants engage directly with materials and activities
- Reflection & Discussion – Space for shared learning and connection
- Application & Takeaways – Practical steps participants can apply in daily life

Partnerships with local organizations and practitioners enhance both program quality and reach, while also creating opportunities for collaboration and continued engagement.

Outcomes & Impact

Although the series is a forward-looking initiative, the development process generated meaningful outcomes:

- Stronger alignment with community needs through direct engagement with participants and organizational partners
- Increased program relevance through iterative feedback loops
- New relationships with healthcare providers and senior-serving organizations
- Improved accessibility through intentional design for older adults

The model also creates layered value:

- Social: Supports intergenerational connection and reduces isolation
- Educational: Builds knowledge of nutrition, gardening, and wellness
- Organizational: Introduces a potential earned revenue stream

Strategic Value

This initiative represents a shift toward a more resilient and integrated organizational model:

- Revenue Diversification: Fee-based workshops aligned with mission
- Expanded Audience Reach: Increased engagement with older adults
- Partnership Development: Opportunities with healthcare and community organizations
- Mission Alignment: Strengthens the connection between food access, education, and health

Recommendations

To move this work forward, the organization could:

- Pilot the workshop series with a targeted cohort and refine based on feedback
- Develop a pricing model that balances accessibility with revenue goals
- Formalize partnerships with healthcare and senior-serving institutions
- Integrate workshops into broader community engagement and funding strategies

Reflection

This project reinforced the importance of designing with the community in mind. By grounding strategy in stakeholder input, lived experience, and iterative feedback, it is possible to create programming that is both responsive and sustainable.

It also highlighted the value of intergenerational programming to strengthen community connection and demonstrated how program design can bridge mission, impact, and financial resilience.

Growing Community Workshop Series

Workshop 1: Soil and Health – Our Connection with the Earth

Healthy soil is the foundation of a thriving garden and nutritious food. Learn how soil affects plant growth in this hands-on workshop. Practice techniques to improve soil fertility and take part in a soil test experiment to uncover what's happening beneath the surface. Whether you're gardening in a backyard, container, or raised bed, you'll gain the skills to cultivate rich soil that nourishes both plants and people.

Special Guest: NOFA/Mass (Northeast Organic Farming Association, Massachusetts Chapter)
– <https://www.nofamass.org/>

Workshop 2: Garden Remedies – The Healing Power of Plants

Discover how plants support health and how different parts of plants (roots, stems, leaves, flowers, and seeds) can be used for wellness. Join us for a farm walk to identify local edible and medicinal plants, their benefits, and gather inspiration for using them in daily life.

Special Guest: Boston Nature Center (Mass Audubon)
– <https://www.massaudubon.org/programs/boston-nature-center>

Workshop 3: Pruning & Weeding – Garden Strategies for Growth

Find out when and how to prune and weed plants to help them grow stronger and stay healthy. Practice safe, effective techniques that improve soil and plant resilience. Hands-on demonstrations will build your confidence in shaping a thriving garden.

Special Guest: Boston Food Forest Coalition – <https://www.bostonfoodforest.org/>

Workshop 4: The Sweet Science of Honey – A Beginner’s Guide

Explore the role of bees in food production and ecosystem health. Observe bee behavior up close, taste different varieties of honey, and learn how to support pollinators in your backyard or community. This workshop is a great first step for anyone interested in beekeeping or understanding the importance of pollinators.

Special Guest: Best Bees Company – <https://bestbees.com/boston/>

Workshop 5: Small Gardens, Big Cities – Fresh Food in Tiny Spaces

Explore vertical gardening, container planting, and hydroponics to grow fresh, nutritious food in small spaces. Get hands-on experience assembling a potato barrel or mushroom-growing kit and leave with the tools to transform any small space into a productive garden.

Special Guest: Urban Farming Institute – <https://www.urbanfarminginstitute.org/>

Workshop 6: Sip and Savor – Everyday Herbs

Discover the culinary and medicinal uses of common herbs. See how to grow, harvest, and preserve herbs for year-round use. Enjoy a hands-on tea-blending session and assemble your own windowsill herb garden to bring fresh flavor into your home.

Special Guest: Commonwealth Center for Holistic Herbalism – <https://commonwealthherbs.com/>

Workshop 7: Rain Rescue – Reclaiming Water and Reviving Gardens

Experience practical approaches to conserve water while keeping plants healthy, from rainwater harvesting to drip irrigation and self-watering containers. Demonstrations and activities will help you create a water-efficient garden that thrives even during dry periods.

Special Guest: Charles River Watershed Association – <https://www.crwa.org/>

Workshop 8: Winter Rest, Spring Renewal – Seasonal Garden Hacks

Prepare your garden for a successful growing season with strategies to protect soil, select crops, and plan for harvest. Get practical tips to reduce work while maximizing yield, and discover seasonal hacks to set your garden up for long-term success.

Special Guest: Grow Boston – <https://content.boston.gov/departments/growboston>

Workshop 9: Garden Goodness – Homemade Healing

Your garden can be your own natural pharmacy. Craft simple, plant-based remedies for common ailments, from infused oils to healing salves and syrups. This workshop is perfect for anyone interested in herbal first aid, immune-boosting remedies, or self-care using homegrown ingredients.

Potential Guest: Boston School of Herbal Studies – <https://www.bostonherbalstudies.com/>

Workshop 10: Harvesting Health – A Flavor Adventure

Food is fuel and a tool for wellness. Explore how fresh, seasonal ingredients can transform everyday meals into vibrant, nourishing experiences. Learn simple cooking techniques from a local farm-to-table chef, taste seasonal ingredients, and take away practical tips to bring more vitality and flavor to your meals.

Special Guest: Local Restaurants and Farms