Community Accountability Agreement - Urban Agriculture Liaison Position

**Executive Summary**

This community accountability agreement is a set of principles and directives that will guide the Urban Agriculture Liaison (UAL) and the City of New Orleans ('City') Office of Resilience and Sustainability (ORS), as the office housing this position, to ensure that the grower (i.e. farmers and gardeners of all kinds; alternatively referred to as ‘agriculturalists’ in other City documents) community of New Orleans is included, honored, heard, and represented as they, the UAL and said community, collectively work to advance urban agriculture in the city. It is designed to help the UAL navigate the strengths, complexities, and challenges of the New Orleans grower community and, ultimately, be grounded and successful in their role. The goal of such a document is to ensure mutual understanding of this role between city government, specifically ORS and the UAL, and New Orleans growers. The UAL is a role that, first and foremost, was imagined and brought into existence by the community- it exists to serve the community.

This agreement is aligned with the City’s commitment to utilize urban agriculture to address climate change, combat food insecurity, and promote a sustainable, equitable, and robust local food system. The UAL recognizes the value in the local growers' diverse and collective voices and approaches community engagement with genuine curiosity, a discerning mind, and respect.

The remainder of the agreement articulates important values that the UAL is expected to lead within their role, and it also offers specific mechanisms for how this role demonstrates community accountability. The urban agriculture working group (UAWG) is a key structural mechanism for how the UAL ensures they are grounded in and accountable to the community. This agreement primarily, but not exclusively, centers around the use of the UAWG and how to ensure its robust development and engagement.

**Value in equity and justice**

Urban agriculture is a dynamic and diverse set of practices in New Orleans. Everyone in the New Orleans growing community brings their own expertise, practices, experiences, resources, and perspectives into what they do. The UAL must ensure the diversity of growers, growing operations, grower-led organizations, and grower-support entities (i.e. nonprofits, civic organizations, etc.) are consulted, supported, and amplified in their work.

Accountability Measures:

* Partner with community members, including the UAWG, to enact structures/processes for the UAWG, including recruitment, governance, terms, etc. (See Communication Clause for further clarity on UAWG role)
  + For the initial development and recruitment process, community members and members of the A Greener New Orleans team are partners in the CAB development process
* Prioritize diversity along the following lines, at a minimum, in representation on the CAB:
  + Entity/institution represented (e.g. non-profit, university extension, city government, community gardener, urban farmer).
  + At least 50% of the advisory group should be urban farmers and/or community gardeners.
  + Racial diversity reflecting the demographics of the city.
  + At least 50% of the advisory group should be composed of women, gender expansive, and non-men identifying people.
  + Aging, youth, and those affiliated with faith-based organizations should also be considered for CAB membership.
* Continuous effort to reduce barriers to CAB participation for people that have historically been underrepresented/marginalized/systematically excluded from positions of authority and power. Examples include:
  + Securing funding to pay for childcare and meals during meetings, stipends for board members that are not otherwise compensated for time/labor on the board (i.e. non-profit staffers would not receive stipends, if board duties are under scope of work for paid job), etc.
  + A variety of meeting types/formats (i.e. digital, in-person, phone, etc.)
  + Report-outs and facilitation developed and delivered in ways that prioritize community accessibility (i.e. accessible language free of jargon or unnecessarily complex language, semi-informal meeting style, etc.)
  + Clear communications around expected time commitments and generous timelines given for completion of work.
* Demonstrate initiative in creating, collaborating, or supporting opportunities for Black, Indigenous & historically systematically excluded peoples of all agricultural experience, to access land or opportunities to be grounded on land (employment, trainings, education, capital for land purchase, grant support, fellowship, reparations, land transfers, etc.)
  + Prioritize support for people who are from or grew up in New Orleans (Black\*) who may or may not otherwise have access to these opportunities. Of any & all experience levels.
  + Prioritize support for projects which rematriate land, or otherwise maintain land ownership, for Black and Indigenous persons with generational/ancestral ties to particular sites or this land, writ large. Level of agricultural experience notwithstanding.
  + Maintain records of work completed in support of this, including percentage of community members aided that are self-identifying ‘Black, Indigenous & historically systematically excluded peoples of all agricultural experience’
* All written reports and recommendations produced by the UAL must include an explicit equity and justice analysis which speaks to the following:
  + Implications of proposed policies/programs/etc. for equity and justice
  + Specific instances of extant injustices/inequities that are yet to be addressed

**Listening**

As a liaison and public servant, the UAL cannot do their job well without listening to the experiences, wants, needs, and dreams of the urban agriculture community. Importantly, the UAL must listen without judgment and with the sole orientation to be helpful to the grower. While the UAL may not always be the right person to help a grower, they are expected to be able to always point them towards the appropriate resources. Fundamentally, this role does not penalize, persecute, or otherwise act punitively towards growers and does not support or engage in those activities.

Accountability Measures:

* Develop a CAB to establish a committed pipeline of feedback and input on the progress of the role/its work
* Convene and facilitate public quarterly meetings for the CAB and interested members of the public to relay information, issues, and feedback to UAL
* Identify a time interval/day that may be convenient for growers where the UAL is available for questions and concerns (i.e., office hours).
  + These times should NOT interfere with standing community events or market opportunities, to the degree possible. For example, the UAL should not/cannot hold virtual or City Hall office hours on Tuesday mornings, as this conflicts with a longstanding Crescent City Farmers Market (CCFM).
  + Office hours may potentially be held, in-person and in coordination with relevant parties, at the following locations which may be convenient for growers:
    - At CCFM, at least one hour prior to the start of market
    - At the USDA Urban Agriculture Office on Bayou Road
    - At community gardens around town
    - Particular effort should be made to hold office hours in coordination with community partners from/in significant agricultural areas and historically disadvantaged or disenfranchised communities such as: the West Bank, New Orleans East, the Lower Ninth Ward

**Communication**

To effectively liaise between the City and growers, as well as between other relevant stakeholders (e.g. non-profits, extension agents, etc.), the liaison agrees to prioritize effective communication in their work.

Accountability Measures:

* **Urban Agriculture Working Group (UAWG):** This is the primary vehicle for communication between the urban agriculture community of New Orleans and the City of New Orleans via the UAL. As mentioned in the ‘listening’ clause, this is also the place where the community can offer input on the trajectory of the City’s urban agriculture work, including the work of the UAL. This working group is assembled by the UAL and convened on a quarterly basis. The UAWG is a short term solution as the UAL works on the longer process of establishing a formal Community Advisory Board (CAB). The director of ORS, or designee, should also be in attendance. The UAL is required to report out about the work that they have completed over the preceding quarter, and what they plan to accomplish in the coming quarter, including finances. Outreach communications should be sent to the following at least 2 weeks prior to the quarterly meeting, at a minimum:
  + Food Policy Action Council of New Orleans
  + Sprout NOLA
  + Greater New Orleans Growers Alliance (GNOGA)
  + Recirculating Farms
  + VEGGI Cooperative
  + LSU Extension Agents- Dr. Joe Willis and Anna Timmerman
  + Market Umbrella/Crescent City Farmers Market
  + USDA Office of Urban Agriculture New Orleans office staffers from NRCS and FSA
* All reports and UAWG meeting minutes are publicly available on the ORS website, and distributed through the GNOGA listserv
* Responses to email and phone calls within 48 hours of receipt. It is acceptable to respond with a timeline upon which to respect a more thorough response.
  + It is recommended to set an out-of-office responder if out of office/in the field or community for one full business day or longer.

**Collaboration**

Similar to communication, the UAL agrees to prioritize collaboration in completing their work wherever possible and appropriate. The urban agriculture liaison is one part of a robust and longstanding network of organizations and individuals working to support our local food system and growers. In their role as a service provider to urban growers, the UAL does not duplicate work which, in effect, muddies the landscape of support and ultimately creates confusion and inefficiencies. Accountability in community collaboration looks like: dedicating/prioritizing time and effort to the development and maintenance of trusting relationships with community members/organizations, prioritizing collaboration, not duplicating work, passing opportunities/work to other organizations and individuals already doing the work, collaborating in good faith, and contributing to collaborative projects as opposed to being extractive. While these accountability practices do not translate well to specific measures, they are how the UAL agrees to operate when endeavoring to begin or engage in projects of any kind.

Accountability Measures:

* Prioritize relationships and trust building in overall body of work
  + Dedicate at least 5 hours weekly to developing and maintaining trusted relationships with community members and organizations. This can look like:
    - Check-in calls with community members/partners about their urban agriculture-related work/efforts
    - Including trust building activities or features in any/all project and grant proposals
    - Attending community events which are public or to which you have been invited/explicitly given permission to attend. It should be understood that the UAL’s presence may not be appropriate at certain events. The UAL should be attuned to this possibility.
* Maintain an up-to-date and publicly accessible spreadsheet, or repository of any kind, of community entities and operations.
  + To be comprehensively quality checked on an annual basis
* Wherever possible and appropriate, written requests for partnership on new projects.
* Requesting feedback from the CAB on appropriate partners for new projects.
* Mandatory participation in select standing community meetings. The array of urban agriculture community events in New Orleans is staggering and fluid from month-to-month and year-to-year. The following are mandated entry points for community engagement, relationship development, and eventual collaboration. The urban agriculture liaison is expected to maintain relationships with these entities and work to ensure ongoing invitation to the following meetings:
  + Food Policy Action Council General Meetings and Food Production Working Group meetings- UAL to present at FPAC General Meetings at least twice yearly to give general update on the position and current projects
  + Greater New Orleans Growers Alliance general meetings/hosted events
* Re-agree, re-commit, and re-sign to this agreement on an annual basis
  + Signatory responsibilities are to switch from A Greener New Orleans representative to CAB representative upon formation of the board

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While these agreements pertain to the relationship between the Urban Agriculture Liaison (UAL) and the community of growers in New Orleans, it is important to recognize the role that the Office of Resilience and Sustainability has in supporting/empowering the UAL to succeed in the role and its commitments to community. Accordingly, the Director of the Office of Resilience and Sustainability, or whoever directly manages the UAL, is included in this agreement insofar as it is their responsibility to manage the UAL and, in turn, ensure that the UAL’s conduct is in alignment with the outlined agreements.