



Living Healthy, Living Better

Bringing Blue Zone Principles to Your Neighborhood

KULA APPLIED RESEARCH INSTITUTE



This toolkit is for Agrihoods (Agricultural Neighborhoods) and similar communities to design and implement programs that promote well-being, resilience, and social cohesion. Using the **Blue Zone** concept as an organizing story, it provides strategies to improve neighborhood engagement, facilitate pathways for healthy living, and provide ecological education.

Whether you're part of an Agrihood, an urban food forest, or a community garden, this toolkit will help you attune to the place you live in and the people around you!

What is an Agrihood?

An Agrihood is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm surrounded by a neighborhood, where food production is integrated into the neighborhood's core. Unlike traditional suburban developments, Agrihoods prioritize fresh, locally grown food, neighborhood engagement through farming and education, and sustainable land stewardship practices.

Taking inspiration from the Blue Zones

A Blue Zone is where people naturally live longer, healthier, and more fulfilling lives due to an environment that encourages well-being. Blue Zones help build stronger social ties and improve physical and mental health by providing access to green spaces where people can gather, learn and work together.

Check out the Netflix documentary ["Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones"](#) to learn more about the existing Blue Zones around the world!



What can you expect?

This toolkit will guide you through:

- Organizing neighborhood engagement and healthy living programs using the Blue Zone principles
- Designing workshops to build community and educate your neighborhood about regenerative ways of living
- Tracking and sharing impact to inspire other neighborhoods



Green Gate Farms, a living case study

Green Gate Farms, a certified organic community farm, was established by Skip Connett and Erin Flynn in an East Austin neighborhood in 2006. With a vision to work with the community in relocating the food systems, they restored the historic 1902 Bergstrom farmstead, transforming it into a now agricultural neighborhood. Their mission was to cultivate organic food and be good neighbors.

Over time, the need for deeper community engagement and sustainability efforts led to the formation of an Agrihood Working Group made up of neighbors who live at Village Farm, along with other local residents who are interested in regenerative work. This group, consisting of farmers, neighbors, and activists, sought to integrate Green Gate Farms with the broader community. They aimed to create a space for fresh food, connection, and learning, drawing inspiration from Blue Zone principles which have been a guide for Village Farm's community building and health-filled activities.

Village Farm designed programs for gathering, tree planting, shared meals, and hands-on-activities that improved personal and environmental well-being.



Recognizing the importance of partnerships, the Agrihood Working Group expanded their network and secured a grant from the City of Austin through Fruitful Commons, an organization dedicated to community-led agriculture. With this support, they launched a tree-planting program, adding fruit-bearing and native trees to the farm's landscape while providing educational workshops on long-term tree care and ecological health.

Programs like tree plantings, plant-based cooking workshops, and knowledge-sharing gatherings are reinforcing Blue Zone ideals of community and shared purpose. Residents continue to shape the farm's role in their neighborhood, imagining the Village Farm as a space beyond home and work—a place for learning, celebration, and collaboration.

Step 1: Connecting with Place and People

Connecting with the place and people is the first step in any neighborhood regeneration work. Before implementing anything, it's critical to understand the neighborhood needs, strengths, and stories.

Key Steps

- Spend time with the community and identify local leaders and social networks
 - Who are actively involved in the community?
 - What are their key contributions?
 - Are there any informal or traditional leadership structures in place?
 - How do people typically come together to address local issues?
 - How do they mobilize resources or people in the community?
 - How do they communicate and engage with different groups within the community?
- Host community gatherings and listening circles to map out existing resources, needs, and aspirations of the members
- Check out our [Community Storytelling Toolkit](#) for guidance on capturing and cultivating a shared sense of belonging
- Observe the land, its seasons, water flow, and history while integrating indigenous knowledge and regenerative education to deepen connection



Case Study Insight

Listening circles at Village Farm helped residents shape the farm's role as a shared space. These gatherings led to the formation of the "Agrihood Working Group" which now facilitates community tree plantings, plant-based cooking classes, and other wellness activities.

Step 2: Defining Shared Identity and Designing Programs



Case Study Insight

After learning about Blue Zones, a Village Farm resident realized the neighborhood already has many aligned activities: the plant-based cooking classes and potlucks she hosts, a farm stand with organic produce from the farm, and wellness activities like yoga. Additionally, neighbors look out for each other and organize social events, which build community connections and combat loneliness. Inspired, she now uses the Blue Zone principles as an organizing story for the regenerative actions taking place at Village Farm.

Key Steps

Outlook

- Visioning: Facilitate visioning workshops where community members explore longevity, well-being, regenerative living
- Roadmapping: Develop a roadmap with clear steps to integrate Blue Zone practices into neighborhood
- Shared purpose: Guide community members in defining personal and collective goals for long-term well-being

Eat wisely

- Plant-based cooking classes: Teach healthy, seasonal recipes using local, farm-fresh ingredients
- Local markets and farm stands: Create direct access to farm produce and flowers while supporting local businesses

Connect

- Farm tours and educational workshops: Provide hands-on learning in organic farming
- Garden, bird-watching clubs: Establish clubs that encourage intergenerational participation in nature-based activities
- Family first: Host potluck, storytelling circles and community gatherings to strengthen family-first values

Move naturally

- Movement and meditation sessions: Host yoga, walking groups, and mindfulness programs
- Tree planting: Engage schools, families, and businesses in hands-on environmental restoration

Step 3: Thriving for Sustainability

Next, we will need to ensure we have the right team in place and secure diverse funding to sustain the model.

Key Steps

- Create a rotational leadership model where different members take turns in key responsibilities, ensuring diverse perspectives and shared accountability
- Design revenue-generating activities in the neighborhood such as educational workshops, farm tours and events to ensure financial sustainability
- Identify government grants, philanthropic support, and impact investors who align with the Agrihood's vision to diversify funding sources

Case Study Insight

Clear roles and long-term commitment were key challenges at Village Farm. A network of partners help to sustain engagement and alignment with community needs. Identifying needs and organizing around them allows the emergence of clear actions that members of the group can partake in.



Step 4: Tracking Impact and Sharing the Journey

This is a continuous process. Tracking progress and sharing stories strengthens and invites more neighborhoods into the movement.

Key Steps

- Maintain clear records of community participation and environmental impact
- Quantitative Metrics
 - Number of trees planted: Track reforestation and biodiversity enhancement efforts
 - Attendance at events and workshops: Measure community engagement and identify trends for improvement
 - Skills, knowledge shared and acquired: Document skill-building activities and knowledge achieved through participation
- Qualitative Stories
 - Capture personal experiences, transformations, and the social impact of the initiative
- Case Study Documentation
 - Ensure that every step is well-documented and replicable for other communities looking to create similar models of blue zone living



Case Study Insight

Village Farm's Blue Zone initiatives have engaged over 300 participants across events. The Agrihood Working Group later incorporated these principles into its work, leading to the planting of 75 trees and the creation of various neighbor-led activities including a birding and homestead club.



If you're interested in contributing to the evolving model and bringing some of these ideas to your community, we offer tailored support for individuals and organizations to bring their regenerative vision of a community to life.

Get in touch with us at lamia@inserviceofearth.org