

## **Educator Communities in the Cornell Garden Mosaics Program**

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Educational “learning communities” and “communities of practice” provide alternatives to more top-down train-the-trainer and one-time training approaches. They are useful in creating and disseminating programs and in professional development. Learning communities take advantage of the fact that educators nearly always “re-create” programs to fit their own settings, by first providing opportunities for educators to “experiment” with new approaches, and then bringing them together to share their local experiences and thus further our understanding of educational practices. Communities of practice focus on long-term interactions in which novices learn from more experienced colleagues. Garden Mosaics is an NSF-funded program that uses urban community gardens as a learning lab for intergenerational, multicultural, science education and community action ([www.gardenmosaics.cornell.edu](http://www.gardenmosaics.cornell.edu)). Garden Mosaics created a learning community of about 20 educators who played a major role in developing the program goals and activities, and in adapting the program to numerous settings. The educators reported they benefited from their experience, by gaining a greater understanding of program development and evaluation, community gardens, and the effectiveness of intergenerational communication as a teaching/learning tool, and by expanding their professional networks. However, such a small learning community is a slow means for broad-scale dissemination because relatively few experienced mentors are available to support new individuals learning about the program. An alternative is to work through extant, larger communities of practice, the members of which are interested in learning new educational approaches. Garden Mosaics currently is exploring ways to tap into national organizations that have created such communities and that work in areas consistent with its educational philosophy. Through working with organizations such as the American Community Gardening Association, we hope to disseminate the program broadly while still providing educators opportunities for professional development and for “re-creating” the program to fit local needs.