SUSTAIN
the Australian food network

MELBOURNE
FOOD HUB

Food In Common

Building an Empowering Community Food Program

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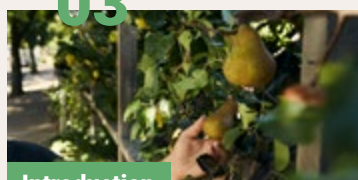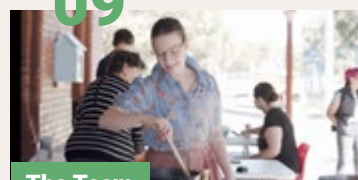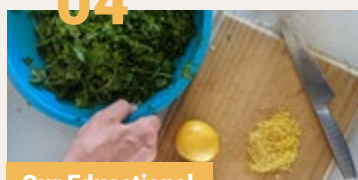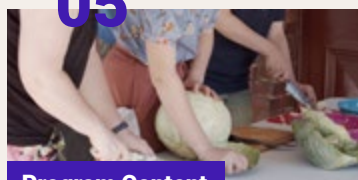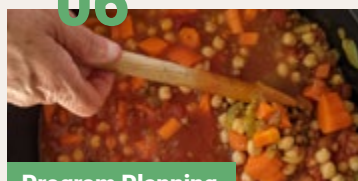
Acknowledgements

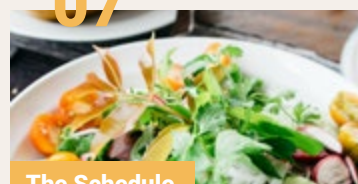## Our Team

Sustain: The Australian Food Network

Sustain: The Australian Food Network is a "think and do" network with extensive experience delivering positive outcomes in food systems change. Its expertise includes project management, events coordination, consultancy, research, and network development. Sustain works with individuals and organisations from the public, community, business, and academic sectors to design and deliver innovative approaches and solutions to a range of food system challenges. Its work creates multiple avenues for shaping food systems thought and practice, optimising health and wellbeing outcomes for the Australian community as a whole. Sustain is trialling collective impact models and new forms of engagement between producers, distributors, businesses, consumers, and government in Victoria through food systems and social enterprise projects like the Melbourne Food Hub.

Melbourne Food Hub

The Melbourne Food Hub is an initiative of Sustain: The Australian Food Network. It creates spaces for Melburnians to engage with their food by providing ways to grow, make, eat, and source food that's fresh, local, and fair. In doing this, it builds communities that see value in every part of the food system.

The Melbourne Food Hub operates as a "distributed" food hub, in the sense that its work isn't confined to one physical place. By building close connections with like-minded people all around town, it improves the resilience of the whole food system—its producers, makers, distributors, eaters, and everyone in between. Alongside its partner organisations, it models innovative practices that demonstrate a localised, circular economy in the heart of Melbourne.

Project Facilitators

Georgia Karavis

Project Coordinator / Sustain

Georgia advocates for more equitable food systems by working with communities experiencing disadvantage to build capacity from the ground up. She holds a Bachelor of Food Studies from William Angliss Institute.

Madeline Tolson

Student Researcher / Sustain

Madeline is currently completing her Bachelor of Food Studies degree at William Angliss Institute. As part of her study she is researching community food initiatives and their potential to positively impact Australia's food systems.

Our Partner

North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House (NCRNH)

North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House (NCRNH) is a warm and welcoming centre that prides itself on being a place where people feel welcome, relaxed, and valued no matter what their background or personal circumstances. The office door is always open and it always makes time for people who visit, whether they are attending a class, seeking assistance with something or simply dropping in for some company. The heritage Railway House is a small but vibrant community organisation located in the former North Carlton Railway Station in the beautiful Hardy Gallagher Reserve in Princes Hill.

Proudly Supported By

Arcare Family Foundation

The Arcare Family Foundation aims to encourage and support innovations that give all Australians the opportunity to age well. The vision of the Foundation is a community where older people are valued, supported, and thriving. The Arcare Family Foundation provides grants to charitable organisations and research institutions that are working to enhance the health and wellbeing of older Australians through supporting innovative ideas and solutions.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the following organisations, groups, and individuals who made Food in Common happen:

The staff, community of cooks, gardeners and enthusiastic eaters at North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House
Clare Harvey, Urban Farmer at the Melbourne Food Hub
Patrick Turnbull, Two Way Media
Kara Lopa Silva, Graphic Designer
The Collingwood Children's Farm
The Community Grocer

About the Manual

This manual provides practical information about the Food in Common program, specifically related to program content, planning, delivery, and evaluation.

It is our hope that the information provided will illustrate how community/neighbourhood houses, organisations, and groups can implement their own community cooking, gardening, and technology program geared towards creating positive social and health impacts for marginalised people in Australia.

The Food in Common model represents a unique and innovative approach to engaging communities that are often excluded or disadvantaged. This manual is an opportunity for our team to share the knowledge we have gained throughout this pilot project. We encourage questions and inquiries from those who find value in our program and wish to replicate it.

Sustain: The Australian Food Network, 2021
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About Food in Common

Food in Common is a holistic community cooking, gardening, and technology program developed in 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Melbourne, Victoria. As many community services closed their doors and opportunities for vulnerable community members to stay connected dwindled, our team saw an opening to build resilience in people and the services that support them through something we all have in common - food.

Food in Common is a model that blends three common streams of programming often found in community house settings: cooking, gardening, and technology. By combining these streams, community houses can effectively engage more people in new ways both on and offline, while also getting the maximum benefit from facilitator expertise.

Our Aims

- Develop knowledge of healthy, affordable, and sustainable food.

- Develop cooking skills or improve existing ones.

- Reduce food waste at the household level.

- Teach and share practical home or community food growing skills.

- Improve food security.

- Increase technological literacy skills so people feel confident to communicate online.

- Provide inclusive spaces to socialise and feel connected to the community on and offline.

- Create an opportunity to participate in a group social activity, tailored to individual ability.

- Provide safe and supportive spaces for connections across ages, life experiences, and financial means.

Our Model

During COVID-19 Lockdown

- Fortnightly online recipe video.

- Corresponding take-home cooking packs available for delivery or contact-free collection.

- Fortnightly online meeting catch ups.

- Weekly emails and Facebook group chats to share cooking and gardening resources.

Transition

- Fortnightly online recipe video.

- Corresponding take-home cooking packs available for delivery or contact-free collection.

- Fortnightly online meeting catch ups.

- Weekly emails and Facebook group chats to share cooking and gardening resources.

- Fortnightly in-person community lunches with restricted numbers, masks and distancing as necessary.

- Fortnightly garden forage and harvest.

Restriction Free

- Fortnightly online recipe video.

- Weekly emails and Facebook group chats to share cooking and gardening resources.

- Fortnightly in-person community lunches with restricted numbers, masks and distancing as necessary.

- Fortnightly garden forage and harvestand gardening.

- Local market garden / urban farm tours.

Our Values

We believe that food is an unrivalled connector and it should be used as such.

Community food programming is often delivered through a foodbank model, designed to address acute food insecurity; this system can be impersonal and create feelings of shame for people seeking assistance (Bazerghi, et al., 2016). We believe that programs should be designed around the central principle of dignity, and delivered with a model that empowers people to build new skills and find a supportive social circle, as well as receive food relief if they need it.

In 2018, an estimated 13 percent of Australia's general population and 32 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People were food insecure (Bowden, 2020). Compounding the issue of food insecurity, over 13 percent of people aged 65 and above experienced loneliness and at least eight percent of that same group were socially isolated (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019).

We recognise that food insecurity is the result of structural inequity and exclusion. However, we believe that the community as a whole can play a significant role in addressing stigma and can work with people to reduce isolation and loneliness through the provision of food relief. To truly address food insecurity, we need to prioritise care, continuity, and community rather than just supply.

Many community houses, including the Railway House, already deliver some form of food relief as well as providing security and comfort through engagement. As such, they have a special ability to address food insecurity in a dignified way by leveraging existing connections with local people and community agencies/programs to reimagine the foodbank model.

By valuing food as a human right, recognising its value as a social connector, and working with a local community house, Food in Common provides an opportunity to address the loneliness and isolation experienced by Australian seniors and other marginalised groups.

Crucially, we believe that everybody has something to contribute, no matter what their experience in the kitchen is.

"Food security is a human right that means all people at all times have equitable access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food."

(Bowden, 2020)

Context

Food in Common evolved at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Melbourne, Victoria in order to address the needs of an existing community cooking group who would otherwise have been extremely isolated. During this time, Foodbank Australia reported a 47 percent increase in the demand for food relief (Donati and Rose, 2020), and Council on the Ageing Victoria (2020) reported that older people were "distressed or fearful for the future, as people [became] increasingly isolated from each other." As such, we set to work creating an opportunity for distanced participation so that our most vulnerable community members could stay connected despite the unfolding pandemic and the imposition of restrictions and lockdowns.

While we hope that COVID-19 will not continue to impact the rollout of similar programs across Australia, it is our wish that the Food in Common program can provide an example of community engagement that is flexible, replicable, and adaptable.

At Sustain, we see a promising opportunity for this program to continue to benefit seniors and other marginalised people as well as contributing to important community innovation work in Australia. We extend an enormous thank you to the Arcare Family Foundation for funding this pilot project and value their focus on creating such innovative solutions to problems often faced by older Australians.

Target Audience

Our pilot was targeted towards seniors but could be easily adapted to accommodate other members of the community. In fact, since we began, our program has grown to include isolated and disadvantaged people of all ages, including people with disabilities, those facing mental health challenges, isolation and financial difficulty, including unhoused people. Additionally, the program has attracted newcomers who do not present as disadvantaged, including those exercising on the nearby trail, people tending the community garden, retirees seeking opportunities to "give back," and friends of "original" participants.

It is our belief that this type of flexible programming is necessary to encourage safe social activities for those who often face barriers to entry such as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, people with limited mobility or poor transport, and people experiencing social anxiety.

Impact

54.5%
of participants throw away food less than before

81.8%
of participants try new recipes more, or a lot more than before

72.7%
of participants cook meals at home using healthy ingredients more, or a lot more than before

63.7%
of participants feel more, or a lot more confident about cooking a variety of healthy meals

90.9%
of participants enjoyed cooking together and sharing a meal in-person.

100%
more participants feel confident learning things online through videos and articles.

"A great way to keep in touch with people as well as doing something independently."

(Participant Reflection)

Notes on Measurement

To see how we measured impact, refer to Section 10.

Though we undertook evaluations at the beginning, middle and end of the program, participants were not required to respond to any/all of the measures.

Final evaluation of the pilot program showed mixed results, particularly in relation to technology measures including confidence and use (see below).

We chose to continually welcome participants into the program, with a significant number of new enrolments once in-person classes returned and COVID-19 restrictions eased. As a result, some participants did not engage in online programming at all. Amongst the newer participants, fewer faced barriers to digital participation, and those who did face barriers were not interested in improving or increasing their digital participation. Future iterations of this program may benefit from integrating digital learning into the in-person cooking sessions.

Our Educational Approach
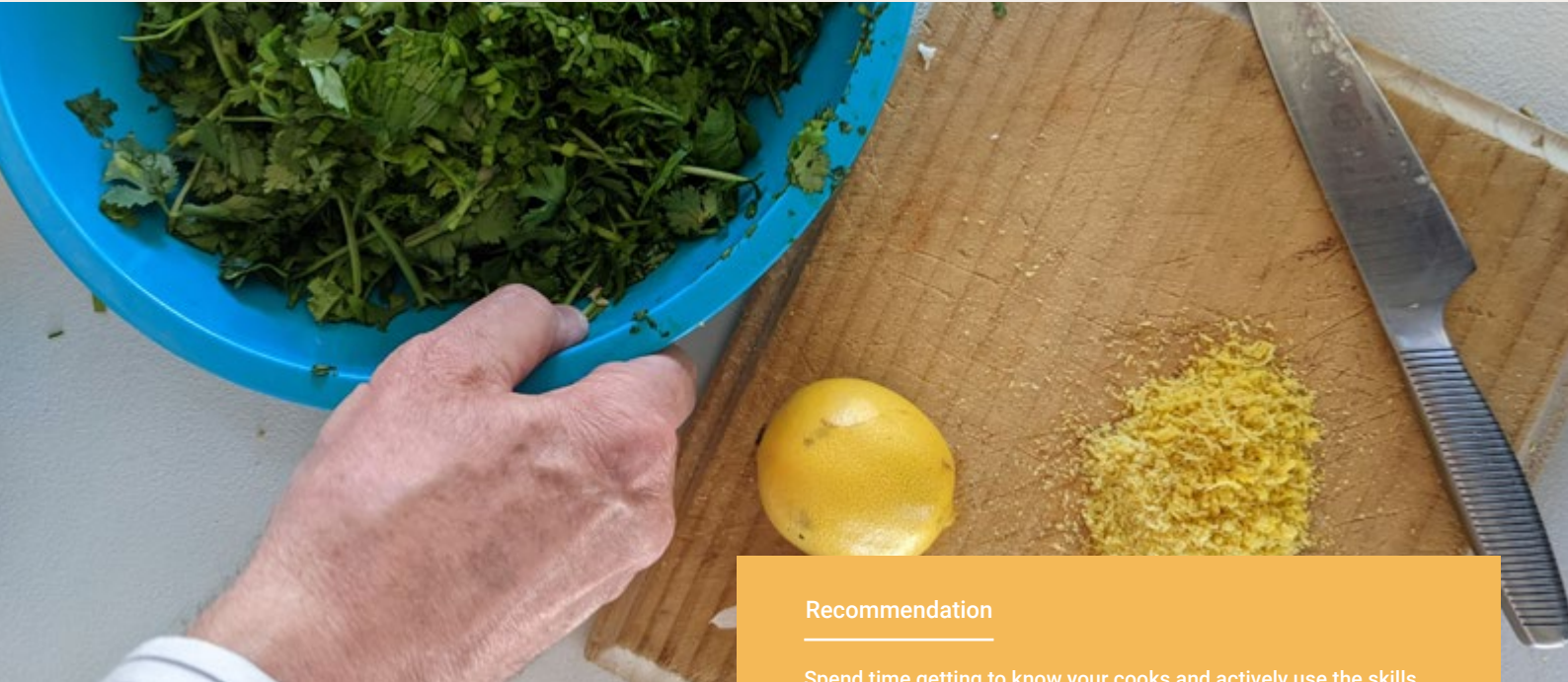
Recommendation

Spend time getting to know your cooks and actively use the skills that they bring to the table to encourage others to try new things.

Learn by Doing

Our participants were encouraged to take an active role in developing new skills by participating in:

- Fortnightly cooking classes and lunch in-person and/or online.

- Harvesting produce from the neighbouring Railway Garden.

- Participating in online social activities including using a Facebook group, sending emails and meeting catch ups.

It is important to note that our cohort had varying levels of comfort in terms of participation. Some people would simply watch the online recipe videos and occasionally email questions or comments. Some would take part by observing in-person cooking, coming to eat, or assisting with clean up. Other participants were keen to help but required guidance and demonstrations to feel confident. Over time, most attendees expanded their repertoire and joined in on new activities, from harvesting herbs to posting a photograph on Facebook.

We regularly communicated alternative ways to participate during cooking sessions, and consistently enabled people to select a task that suited their preferences. While this level of facilitation meant that it took some time to get to know participants, drawing on existing relationships through the NCRNH staff and encouraging confident peers to lead others in activities was immensely useful.

In addition to in-person cooking classes, we also supplied take-home recipe packs with accompanying fortnightly YouTube videos. We found that providing portioned ingredients and instructive videos encouraged people to try new food, discreetly ask questions, experiment and learn—particularly those less comfortable learning in a group environment, or those unable to attend due to prior commitments, poor mobility or transport.

These in-person and online lessons were supported by facilitated conversations around portion control, use of leftovers, efficient shopping, food waste reduction, produce seasonality and different uses for ingredients, as well as gardening and technology tips.

Incorporating Technology

The previous section briefly touched on the technologies used to engage participants during the COVID-19 restrictions and beyond. Below we will delve into more detail about how and why each technology was employed, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions.

- ### Online Catch Ups

    Fortnightly meetings were used to enable participants to catch up and debrief on how they went cooking the recipe, what adjustments they made, and what they would do differently next time. Some participants chose to cook during the meeting so they could ask questions, enabling a fantastic opportunity for peer-to-peer learning. We also set aside time to discuss home gardening successes and challenges, as well as plan what crops we would like to plant in the Railway Garden.

- ### Recipe Video

    Nearly 55% of our seniors preferred to learn online via videos rather than written content. As such, each fortnight we would film the chosen recipe in advance and upload it to YouTube. The recipe was cooked at the facilitator's home with regular equipment (and occasionally a burnt pan or two), slowly demonstrating techniques and explaining the dish, as well as possible variations. The video was filmed on an iPhone with a basic phone stand and simply edited with iMovie.

- ### Social Media Group

    In order to keep a more consistent and casual level of social connection, we also established a Facebook group allowing for ongoing communication, as well the chance to learn how to use social media. We found that encouraging social media use amongst a group of peers reduced the stress and possible embarrassment of "messing up." Over time participants gained confidence and shared recipes, photos of their "lockdown meals," as well as commenting supportive messages on each other's posts.

- ### Email

    Written recipes were provided via a group email that included the link to the recipe video and suggestions for recipe adaptions according to dietary restrictions, and how to store or repurpose leftover food, or what to serve it with.

    This multimedia approach to teaching throughout pandemic restrictions, as well as the continuation of the recipe videos when in-person cooking resumed, ensured that we not only kept a record of recipes but provided multiple opportunities for the cohort to practice the dishes, and share a catalogue of affordable recipes among friends outside of the program.

Recommendation

Allow people to choose what technology they want to engage with - it doesn't have to be all of them. By providing alternatives such as recipe printouts in the short term, you're more likely to convince somebody to try a digital medium in the long term.
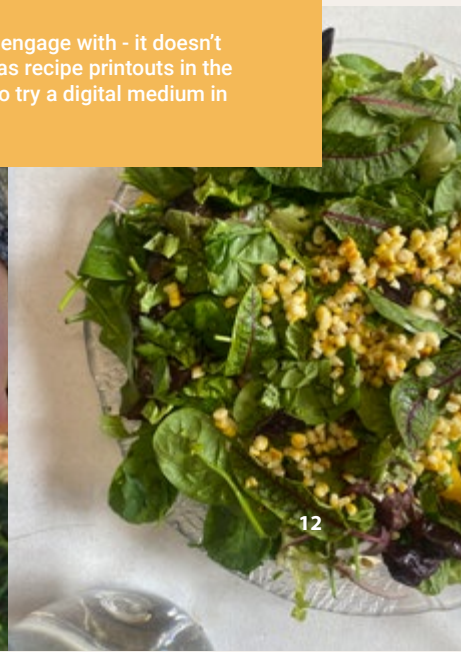
Recommendation

Offer a sliding scale or pay-as-you-feel model to ensure that nobody is discouraged from participating, but those who are able to contribute feel that they are the intended beneficiaries of the project too.

Community Connectedness

Establishing a strong connection with the group that was built on trust and respect was fundamental to the program's success. Developing knowledge of healthy, affordable, and seasonal food, encouraging people to try new dishes or post a photo to social media would not be possible without the trust of our participants.

In order to build a program centered around community needs, the strong relationship with NCRNH was invaluable. Without their expertise, connections, and facilities, these kinds of projects could not assist the community. Crucially, the relationship between Sustain and the neighbourhood house allowed both organisations to expand their reach, build professional skills in community engagement and food systems respectively, and provide new engagement points for people previously not connected to the house.

As Food in Common progressed to in-person delivery, it became apparent that people with a disability and their carers rarely had access to non-disability specific programming. While group activities can sometimes be difficult for people with a disability, cooking provides the flexibility for people of all abilities to participate, particularly with the help of a support worker.

Furthermore, the program was offered at no cost to participants, which was crucial to ensure access to people of all socio-economic backgrounds, and demonstrate inclusivity from the first encounter. That being said, participants who were able to were given the option to pay a small fee ranging from $5 to $15 per session, which contributed to the cost of food purchases, including additional fresh produce for the NCNRH's free food pantry.

"I was experiencing loss and depression. Food in Common inspired me to renew my interest in cooking and healthy lifestyle. The Food in Common group was very friendly, and I made many new friends."

(Participant Reflection)

Valuing The Lives, Knowledge, and Abilities of Participants

Our teaching method centres participants and their knowledge—a reimagined melting pot of capability where everybody has something to add, small or large. It was important that the facilitator established themself as as a supporter rather than an expert, and guided people to participate in a way that felt comfortable to them. In each session we encouraged any contribution, be it a complex cooking technique or simple gardening tip.

Our main goal was to build skills that are relevant to people's real lifestyles, so that they would actually be used outside of the program. For example, stressing the importance of a perfectly julienned carrot to a participant who mostly eats microwave dinners is unlikely to have the desired effect. Rather, suggesting grating the carrot is more likely to be an achievable goal.

Conversations played an important role in each class, often prompted with questions about how people cook at home, their favourite flavour combinations, and how their home garden was progressing. One of our CALD participants regularly collected leftover produce and suggested ways she could use it - always an enlightening topic of conversation that revalues the food and generates new ideas for reducing food waste.

When designing the recipes, we focused on cooking from a variety of cultures and methods to expose participants to a wide range of tastes, in the hope that one or two would resonate, and become a staple in their cooking. In so doing, it is also vital to provide participants the chance to share their food culture and take the lead, even though it may deviate from the written recipe.

To encourage creativity, create space for people who don't respond to written recipes, as well as build flexibility in people's repertoire, we supplied or harvested a range of "additional" ingredients such as lettuce, tomato, chilli, and capsicum so that people could make up their own recipes. Facilitating a conversation around how people approach the same ingredients can result in delicious and unexpected results, as well as encourage cautious eaters to try something new. For example, an abundance of kale in the community garden one week led to suggestions of soup from one participant, slaw from another and quiche from a third.

At different stages of the program we would also draw on and use the recipes of other organisations in Victoria. Specifically, during Harmony Week 2021 we purchased the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's "Feast for Freedom" recipe pack as a way to demonstrate some new recipes and support an important organisation.

Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment

Consciously creating an environment that is empowering and enjoyable for participants is fundamental to any successful community program. This is a chance to model positive, inclusive, and interested relationships of care for those who may have trouble moderating their own behaviour or have felt unsafe in other areas of their life. It is important to cultivate a non-judgmental space and allow participants to engage in ways they feel comfortable.

Recommendation

Reach out to, and partner with local food organisations and enthusiastic cooks in your midst to diversify your education while also supporting the surrounding community.
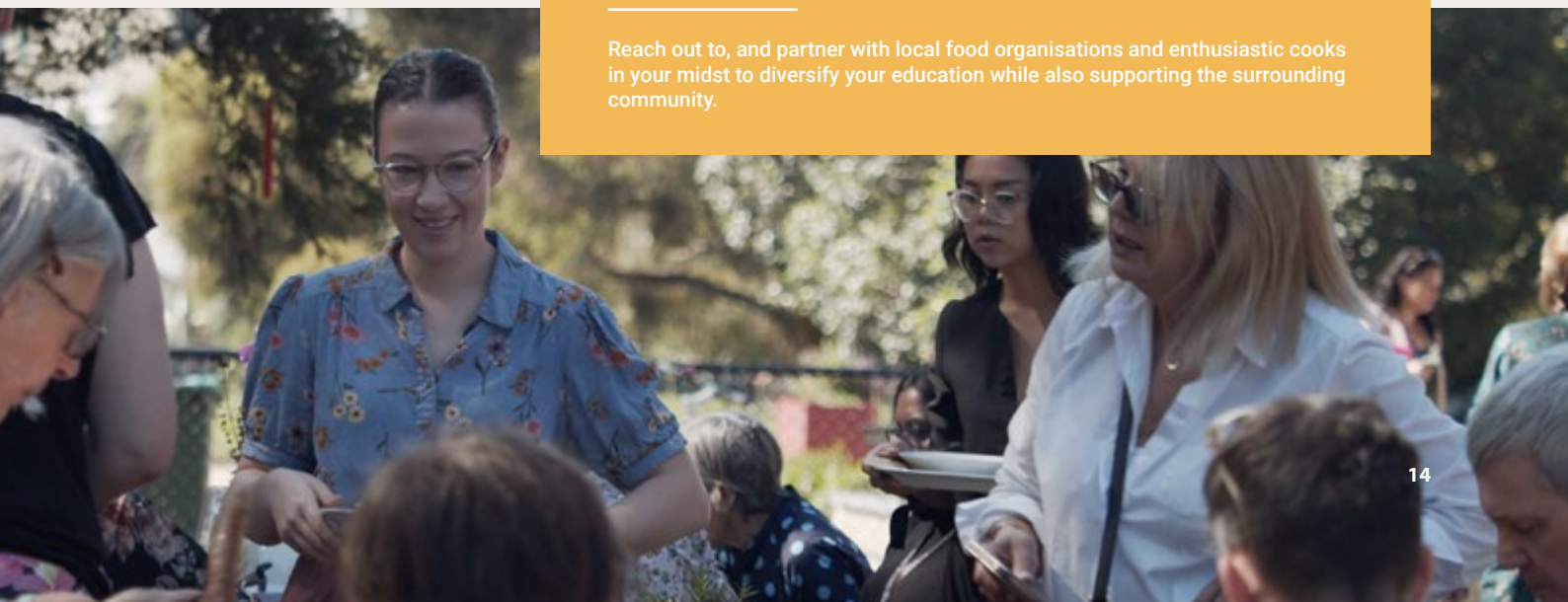
Program Content and Delivery

The following section will provide a more detailed description of the content of the Food in Common program and its various modes of delivery.

Cooking Classes

Teaching cooking skills to participants involved a three-tiered approach that was flexible enough to adjust depending on the restrictions of the time. It is our hope that COVID-19 will not affect future iterations of the program, however the multifaceted delivery approach was incredibly valuable for engaging and educating different people. Online and/or mixed delivery is especially significant for those who want to stay connected to local community programs but face barriers to in-person attendance.

- **In-Person Cooking Classes**

  The process of an in-person cooking class will be expanded upon in the following section, but it is important to note that this mode of delivery is crucial not only to forming a strong community built on trust, but engaging a larger and more diverse group. We found that while many enjoyed online learning, when in-person cooking resumed our numbers increased. That being said, online and in-person cohorts varied and a smaller group preferred to remain online only, regardless of COVID -19 settings.

  The menu at in-person cooking classes could be extended beyond the one recipe offered in take home packs (see below). It would consist of one main dish (generally a larger quantity and more substantial dish than the others) with two to three side dishes or desserts. While most of the side dishes were planned with corresponding printed recipes, we only filmed the main dish. The remaining 'unplanned' recipe would be created by discussing possible options for the ingredients with the group and verbally communicating the steps to making it. The cooking class ended with a community lunch open to people participating in other NCRNH programming, as well as passers-by.

- **Recipe Videos**

  Filming and distribution of these instructional step-by-step videos resulted in a catalogue of the program's curriculum but also served to provide the participants with a chance to follow along, pause when needed, and go at their own pace of cooking. These videos were shared on YouTube with participants the week before the in-person cooking session so as to give them a chance to understand the recipe and increase confidence levels. Many of our cohort noted that this visual medium, coupled with the written recipes, increased their motivation to learn and was more engaging than other ways they had learned to cook in the past. It is important to note minimal tech skills and equipment are required to create these videos, as it is more meaningful for the video to capture a familiar face cooking in a home scenario than to create a highly produced, flashy video.

- **Take Home Packs:**

  When the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to in-person cooking classes, we were not only conscious of the increased isolation experienced by our seniors (the majority of participants lived alone), but also the rise in food insecurity. To ensure some continuity of care, food supply, and social engagement, the free recipe packs were created. Each pack consisted of a printed recipe with a link to the recipe video, and all of the ingredients required to make two portions or more. Packs could be collected contact-free at the NCRNH, or were dropped to the doorstep of individual houses. To keep people connected through cooking and enjoying a delicious, healthy meal, we supported the packs with fortnightly Zoom sessions, and a Facebook group.

Gardening Skills

- **The Railway Garden**

At the NCRNH, we were fortunate enough to have access to the fabulous Railway Garden, which grows a diverse range of produce for community benefit. Each in-person cooking class would involve a short walk to harvest excess produce, pick herbs, and design dishes on the spot. This presented an excellent opportunity to teach people about seasonality, variety, and how to utilise ingredients people tend to be uncomfortable using in their cooking. Note that the garden doesn't need to be extensive—we mostly used easy, cheap, and quick crops like lettuce, kale, and spring onions.

- **Home Gardening**

Throughout the cooking sessions, participants often took the opportunity to swap stories of their own home gardening successes and challenges. We found that this group was particularly motivated when it came to gardening and at times knew more than our team did. That being said, a number of free resources are available online demonstrating how easy it is to establish small, manageable potted gardens to grow herbs and greens.

- **Farm Tours**

To motivate participants to grow their own food as well as educate about food system challenges, we offered tours to nearby urban farms to demonstrate how food is being produced in urban environments. These day trips operated outside of our regular cooking classes and were offered at no cost to participants. We visited the Melbourne Food Hub's Alphington urban farm and the Collingwood Children's Farm market garden to explore themes including permaculture, garden bed techniques, plants suited to Melbourne's climate, and why local, sustainable food is important to addressing climate change.

- **Social Media and Technology Skills**

Initially we had scoped the delivery of tech-training sessions with a drop-in delivery style so participants could learn one or more of the skills necessary to participate in the online components of the project. COVID-19 restrictions prevented this from occurring, but thankfully most participants were able to engage with clear written instructions and explanations over Zoom. We recognise that this may not be the case for all cohorts and recommend linking with local library services who often offer free technology support, which can be delivered over the telephone.

Tips for Success

01	Keep People Busy	Design menus with a range of tasks that require varied skill levels and timings.
02	Cater to Different Tastes	Ensure that recipes draw from a multitude of cuisines / cultures, and that there is more than one dish on offer at in-person sessions.
03	Actively Facilitate the Group	The in-person session is a mix of cooking and socialising with the group. Make time to talk with participants while completing tasks together.
04	Create a Positive Environment	Always be responsive and listen when people raise issues or just need to talk even if it means the food comes second.

Program Planning

This section provides a brief overview of the planning and considerations that go into structuring this program.

Recipe Planning

Ensure Recipes Are:

- Flexible enough to exclude or replace ingredients that participants are not able to eat (e.g. removing chilli, suggesting oil as an alternative to butter).

- Easily cooked in larger quantities (e.g. making a large quantity of risotto can be time consuming and difficult to get right).

- Simple enough that anyone can follow along.

- Contain enough steps so that everyone has a role to play in making the dish (e.g. lots of chopping).

- Able to be scaled down, easily frozen, or used in a different way for people who live alone (e.g. turning a roasted vegetable salad into a tart).

- Not dependent on special equipment and don't all require the same equipment at the same time (emphasise alternative equipment you can use, e.g. mortar and pestle instead or grater instead of food processor).

- Affordable and highlight nutritious ingredients (e.g. veggies, pulses, and whole grains).

- Inclusive of your community's cultural makeup.

- New and exciting but also a little familiar (e.g. using sweet potatoes, celeriac and herbs instead of potatoes in mash).

Sourcing

Take the opportunity to source produce from sustainable and local growers and businesses. The majority of our food came from the Melbourne Food Hub, The Community Grocer and low-waste wholefoods stores. Sourcing from small, local enterprises is a great way to teach participants about local farming, engage with producers and provide a more sustainable menu.

Our Tips and Tricks:

- Contact local farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture Farms, co-ops, and farm-gates to see if they can provide you with contacts or organise a bulk buying system.

- Refer to the Open Food Network to find local producers and food hubs.

- Contact local health food and dry good stores to purchase pantry items in bulk.

- Contact local grocers and supermarkets to see if they can contribute a monthly donation of pantry items such as oil, flour, spices, or fresh produce.

- Contact foodbanks to see if they can provide free produce.

Filming Recipe Videos

A Few Tips and Tricks When Filming Recipe Videos:

- Make sure to show all steps of the recipe, even if it seems like common sense to you.

- Keep the videos around 10 minutes long so they are short and clear.

- Have the same team who facilitate the in-person classes film the videos as it makes the participants feel comfortable when watching.

- Film all shots in either landscape (best for video hosting services like YouTube) or portrait (best for social media stories).

Communicating with Participants

A Few Pointers:

- Use a large font and wide spacing in written recipes.

- Send reminder emails and create social media posts to remind people of upcoming sessions and share recipes.

- Learn what means of communication works best for each participant and note it down. Use this as your primary method, but challenge participants to try digital channels when they are feeling confident.

The Schedule

How it Works: In-Person

Week 1 - Filming and Recipe Development

- Select, cook, and film the recipe.

- Write the recipe with notes you picked up while cooking.

- Edit and upload the video with the recipe in the YouTube description.

- Share the video, recipe, and upcoming dates via email, and social media group.

- Complete your shopping list and place orders.

Week 2 - Cooking Class

Total time: around 3 hours and 30 minutes

- **Before: 45 minutes**

  Team members arrive at the neighbourhood house and set up cooking stations with equipment and ingredients.

  Note: Some participants will arrive early to help set-up, have a chat, and a cup of tea, and we always welcome their contribution.

- **Beginning: 15 minutes**

  Recipes for that week are explained and hard copies are provided to participants. Divide tasks depending on willingness and skill level. Offer to demonstrate for those who need it and assist participants to prioritise tasks.

- **Cooking: 1 hour and 30 minutes**

  The cooking process is usually a combination of completing tasks, casual conversation, and harvesting from the garden to prepare a salad or add ingredients to the recipes. Here it is important to ensure everyone is engaged (unless they do not wish to be) and that jobs are being rotated, giving everyone a chance to see all aspects of the recipe.

  Note: Clarifications and demonstrations are often needed throughout the session.

- **Lunch: 45 minutes**

  Nearing the end of cooking some participants who do not wish to cook will arrive and help to set-up the tables for lunch. During the lunch it is a great chance to discuss where this week's produce came from, why you decided to make this recipe, and how the ingredients could have been used in a different way.

  Note: You can always set a weekly theme for each session and email it to participants along with the recipe so they have time to reflect if the group is less forthcoming socially.

- **Clean-up: 30 minutes**

  Once lunch is finished the clean-up begins, and we found that people are always keen to contribute to this. After the lunch we often sat to have a chat over a cup of tea with participants to debrief and socialise.

How it Works: Online

Online Class

- **Packing: 1 hour**

1.) Arrive at neighbourhood house and unpack all equipment.

2.) Create a demonstration bag with all required ingredients. Crosscheck with recipe.

3.) Pack bags and add recipe to each.

4.) Label with participant names if necessary to ensure correct distribution.

- **Collection: Times to be determined by neighbourhood house**

Set a collection time frame or deliver to locals who are unable to collect independently.

The Community House

- **People**

  Our project could not have thrived in the way it did without the support and facilities of the NCRNH. Community houses are essential, creating inclusive space for support, conversation, and engagement. The existing networks and knowledge of the house was critical to building such a popular and impactful program.

- **Place**

  In order to run a similar program, a kitchen space with an oven and stove top at a minimum will be needed, as well as communal dining space such as a hall or covered outdoor area. Communal barbecues and outdoor camping stoves are also great back-ups if facilities are basic.

- **Equipment**

  While some basic equipment is necessary, it is important to cook with tools that people already have at home, or can easily acquire. Should you be severely lacking in equipment, putting a public call out for required items (i.e. food processors, pots or pans) through the local newspaper, messageboard or online community sharing groups like "Good Karma" networks on Facebook will generally yield generous donations.

Online

Creating a safe and engaging online space can be a difficult task. It is important to set the tone for all participants by being understanding when people are practicing their new skills. Whether holding online meetings, sending emails or posting to Facebook, the facilitator must create an environment that is collaborative and respectful, prioritising listening, and making space for people to share. When encouraging new people to participate, spending a little time either over the phone or in-person to guide them through what will happen and troubleshoot is a good way to overcome the fear of the unknown.

How to Build a Diverse Group of Participants

Here are some suggested groups who might be interested in getting involved outside of your existing participants:

- Seniors' homes, welfare agencies and NDIS providers.

- Community gardens and foodbanks.

- Universities, TAFEs, and U3As.

- Men's sheds.

- Libraries.

- Health food stores, food hubs, and farmers' markets.

The Team

Who You'll Need to Run Food in Common

Internal Staff

Below is a brief description of the staff required to run this program.

- **Project Facilitator (x1)**

  Manages recipes, program budgets, equipment, activities, communication with participants, and volunteers (in line with community house policies). Approximately 5 - 8 hours per session.

Community House Staff

- **Community Engagement Officer (x1)**

  Manages relationships between participants and advises Project Facilitator on what will work best for community. Supports classes with related programming such as evaluations or community celebrations.

- **Administration (x1)**

  Assists with enrollment, communicating contact details to Project Facilitator, potential to manage correspondence with participants according to neighborhood house protocols as needed.

Volunteers

The Food in Common pilot ran without volunteers but we see a space for them to become involved in future iterations of the program. If possible we recommend bringing on board:

- **Cooking Volunteer (x1)**

  A social person who has strong cooking skills, and is confident working with the participants. Ideally this person would help to set-up the sessions and support the project coordinator to manage cooking duties. This person will need to be an excellent communicator and be willing to spend time chatting and building rapport with people.

- **Gardening Volunteer (x1)**

  A motivated gardener who can help plant, harvest and liaise with a community garden, and/or establish a few herb pots or garden beds on site.

- **Technology Volunteer (x1)**

  Someone to help with technology questions that participants may have on the day.

Evaluating Impact

Methodologies, Reviews and Results

In this section, we will detail the methods used by our team to evaluate the project and suggest how future project evaluations may be improved.

Before the Program

At the very beginning of Food in Common an extensive baseline survey was conducted that asked participants about basic demographic information, technology usage, cooking knowledge and habits, and gardening activities. This detailed survey (linked below) was designed to ensure we were building a project relevant to participant needs and experiences. We recommend that anyone wishing to implement the program and conduct a similar survey selects questions that are relevant to your specific circumstances in order to create valuable data while not overwhelming participants with assessment.

Baseline Survey:
> https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1c07iDlwUhlC5Pa3xgXllPuiP6qpWHTXaE2c0cUmYOeQ/viewform?edit_requested=true

Mid-Term Review

Partway through the pilot, we conducted a short survey and informal review using butcher's paper and markers. We recommend that going forward, Food in Common programs have a designated scrapbook or portfolio that participants can add comments or drawings to whenever they feel appropriate. This method allows feedback throughout the entirety of the program in a casual and non-invasive manner.

Mid-Term Survey:
> https://docs.google.com/forms/d/10hgtqP5EgZW6992e1jQ9XRLuOC0MqEExKm89dEFe3aY/viewform?edit_requested=true

Conversations with Participants (Ongoing Process of Collection):

Quotes and feedback from participants were collected during sessions, and have proved valuable in assessing and meeting participant needs. We suggest utilising a volunteer to take note of participant comments and feedback to evaluate each session and improve the program's delivery.

End of Year Review

This survey was designed to measure the impacts of the pilot program, however it may be useful for future iterations of the program in evaluating impacts and changes in the cohort.

End of Year Survey:
> https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1WLFvJipwe0PQ-TH35OMMzvceTRLKFa2gYjScH-6SlJw/viewform?edit_requested=true

In appendix C of this manual you will find a table containing useful measurements for evaluation and demonstrating impact for reporting purposes.
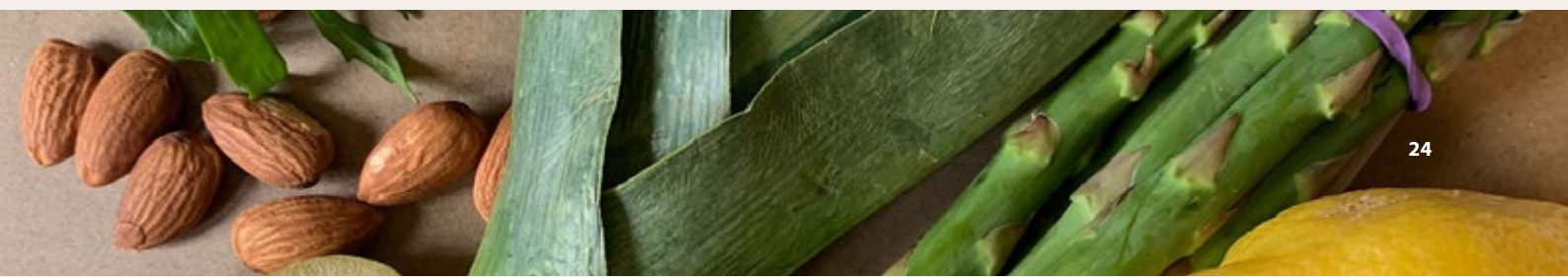
Appendix A

Community Engagement Cooking Program

Position Description: Project Coordinator

We have an exciting opportunity for an engaged, proactive, and passionate project coordinator who will be working with [insert community house/organisation name] to deliver a community cooking, gardening, and technology education program to marginalised communities. The chosen applicant will be responsible for planning recipes, communicating with program participants, coordinating equipment, ingredients, and the [in-person/online] cooking sessions. This position is ideal for someone who has experience in or is motivated to build their community engagement skills and has a strong commitment to healthy, equitable, affordable, seasonal, and delicious food that empowers people.

Duties

- Recruitment of program volunteers and liaising with community house/organisation staff to coordinate and plan the program.

- Engaging with existing community networks to enrol participants into the program.

- Planning and writing recipes, sourcing ingredients, and equipment for the [fortnightly] in-person cooking sessions.

- Communicating with participants via email, phone calls, and social media to provide details of session dates, recipes and other relevant information.

- Managing the project budget and reporting costs to the relevant manager/accountant.

- Coordinating the volunteers including each session and what work they are required to complete during the session.

- Ensuring community house/organisation kitchens and equipment are cleaned after the session.

- Evaluating the program during its delivery and after program completion.

Work Arrangements

- Project coordinator will be required to work [X] number of hours.

- [Casual, permanent part-time or contractor].

Ideal Experience

- [X] months working in the community engagement sector.

- [X] months experience coordinating volunteers.

- [X] months experience coordinating cooking classes or other relevant cooking programs/ positions.

Appendix B
Sample Recipe

Soba Noodles with Ginger Sauce

Ingredients

- 500g Soba Noodles.
- 500g Cabbage (red or green).
- 5 Carrots.
- 5 Spring Onion Stalks.
- ½ cup Sesame Seeds.
- 100g Fresh Ginger.
- 1 tbsp Rice Wine Vinegar.
- 1 tbsp Soy Sauce.
- 1 cup Rice Bran Oil. (or vegetable/grapeseed).
- Lime Juice.

Method

1.) Peel and mince the ginger (or use a fine grater).

2.) Finely slice the spring onions.

3.) Roughly slice the cabbage (it doesn't need to be too fine but make sure it is bite size) and grate the carrots. Set the veggies aside.

4.) Combine the ginger, ½ the spring onions, vinegar, soy sauce and a pinch of salt in a medium bowl.

5.) In a medium pot heat the oil until it comes to a boil.

6.) Pour the oil into the ginger mixture. Be very careful here as the oil is hot and will spit when it touches the mixture.

7.) Bring a large pot of water to the boil and add the soba noodles. Cook until tender (4 - 5 minutes). Strain through a colander.

8.) While the noodles are cooking, heat a medium fry pan and toast the sesame seeds for 1-2 minutes.

9.) Add the vegetables, the remaining spring onions to the soba noodles and pour over 1 cup of the ginger-shallot oil. Mix with tongs to combine.

10.) Garnish the noodles with the toasted sesame seeds and a squeeze of lime.

Watch our Food in Common pilot project videos here:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSTZwp6bdZvAVovUDgsJ11CEt-3do4rnl

Appendix C
Program Evaluation Tool

Useful Measurements for Program Evaluation
Demographics of attendees: gender, age, income, household makeup
Number of attendees (in-person and online sessions)
Kilograms of fresh produce / dry goods / other ingredients cooked
Number and types of recipes made
Number of meals shared and kilograms of food donated
Kilograms and varieties of produce harvested from garden
Volunteer hours and engagement (particularly where it aligns with university interns or retirees re-engaging)
Cooking, gardening, technology - confidence levels of participants (1 to 5 scale)
Number of produce varieties used

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