



## **BASIC STEPS – HOW TO START A COMMUNITY KITCHEN**

There is no cookie cutter approach to starting a community kitchen. Although everyone shares similar benefits, the participating in a ck, start up and maintenance procedures of a kitchen can differ from community to community, from culture to culture. While we find commonalities amongst the operating of various community kitchens, each kitchen is encouraged to operate in a manner that best honours and suits its participants. Below is a suggested outline of basic steps, some kitchens have used successfully to create a new kitchen. Please keep in mind your target group as you read through this and make notes (mental or otherwise) and how these steps can be revised or altered to better reach and accommodate your target group.

### **• Create a small poster/flyer**

Poster/flyer should briefly describe a community kitchen and encourage interested participants. Neighbourhood houses, community centres and local gathering places are good spots to display your poster. Some people even advertise in local community papers or newsletters to attract members. Don't forget to include your name and contact number! We have some examples of posters at <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/?en&CKToolkit#Advertising> Word of mouth is also an effective form of advertising. Tell all your friends and acquaintances about your interest in forming a community kitchen. Before long you'll have enough cooks to get started!

### **• Call a First Meeting**

Once you have four or five interested people, call your first meeting. Host it in your home or meet at a public place in the community. Most community centres or neighbourhood houses will accommodate these types of meetings at no cost. You may want to present the community facility with general information such as the single page – *What is a community kitchen*. This will help them understand what your group is trying to achieve and who knows, they may even be interested in playing a supportive role even after the initial meeting.

Check the list of the already running community kitchens in our directory at: <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/?en&CSBDatabase> and contact a CK leader that lives in your area and invite her or him to your first meeting. It's always helpful to have someone with direct CK experience that will help your group discuss the more challenging issues surrounding communal cooking.

### • **The First Meeting – Guidelines**

The first meeting allows the group to make decisions about their planned time together in a community kitchen. It is suggested to use the checklist (<http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/?resourceSearch&file=Checklist.pdf>) as a general agenda to guide your group through this important meeting. The checklist is a good tool to print out and give to each participant so you can go through it as a group. It is also recommended that someone from the group volunteer to record the decisions made and the questions that will require further discussion. Copies of these minutes should be made available to all members of the group.

After this first meeting there will have been tasks delegated that would include securing a place to cook. In Vancouver there are many different hosts of community kitchens. The following list may give you some ideas on who to approach in your community when you are looking for a kitchen site. Some of the sites that host community kitchens are:

- community centres
- neighbourhood houses
- church kitchens
- apartment or co-op common kitchen areas
- high school home economics rooms
- single room occupancy hotel common kitchen areas

### • **The Second Meeting – Recipe Selection and Groceries**

Recipe selection can be done a week in advance, a month in advance or the day before cooking. After a while some groups feel comfortable enough to choose recipes for the next cooking during the present cooking. What is important in recipe selection is that everyone in the group brings forth recipes that meet the group's needs and desires that were discussed and agreed upon in the first meeting. Encourage group members to bring favourite recipes, recipe books, grocery store flyers and other relevant information on food sales or seasonal foods that could be included. Remember that cost and seasonal availability (see seasonal chart at <http://www.bcfarmersmarket.org/inseason.htm>) will work hand in hand with each other. Keep in mind the length of time each recipe takes to prepare and cook or bake. Make sure that you don't overbook the stove top or oven space.

## • Grocery Money:

The group will need to make a decision on how they want to handle the finances. It may take a few cookings to find the payment method that works the best for your group. Some groups working within a budget will agree to bring their set amount of grocery money each time they recipe plan. It will then be handed over in good faith to the grocery shopper(s). There may be someone in your group who will be unable to contribute any money at all. In this case, perhaps the participant can contribute something else towards the cooking group. Write down the division of chores so that everyone is clear on their roles. For example, use this form

[http://www.communitykitchens.ca/ckfinder/userfiles/files/pdfs/Divide\\_Chores.pdf](http://www.communitykitchens.ca/ckfinder/userfiles/files/pdfs/Divide_Chores.pdf)

Anything from garden produce to frozen meat to child minding could be welcomed as participant contribution. Other groups handle the finances with a reimbursement method. Whether these groups have a per person or per portion budget in mind, they have 2 or 3 people buying all of the groceries. The cost is divided up once they meet to cook and all shoppers are reimbursed.

Some kitchens receive food support from their local food banks. Other kitchens have received donated food support from local retail or wholesale food distributors. These donations may reduce the food costs to an amount that is affordable to the group. Visit <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/?en&FoodSupport> for more more details on food support.

## • The Shopping

Once your group has selected the four or five recipes that will be used for the next cooking session, you have to decide whether you need to double or triple the recipes. This would depend on how many portions each person requires. Once this is determined you are ready to organise the shopping list and choose the shoppers. There are different ways groups deal with this procedure. Here are a couple of examples that have worked well for kitchens:

1. Create one master list of ingredients needed for all of the recipes (e.g. [http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/?resourceSearch&file=CFFF\\_SampleRecipe\\_Shopping.pdf](http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/?resourceSearch&file=CFFF_SampleRecipe_Shopping.pdf)) . Divide the list up so each person in the group buys a portion or have a few individuals take turns buying all the ingredients. The grocery list portions may be divided by food group to make it easier.

2. Create one list per recipe (e.g. <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/ckfinder/userfiles/files/pdfs/ShoppingList.pdf>)

Keep in mind there will be overlap with ingredients needed. Designate one shopper to be responsible for the ingredients for one or two recipes. Most groups either have one or two designated shoppers. Many groups have participants take turns to do the shopping.

Whatever the case may be, shopping should be done as close to the cooking time as possible. Storage of perishable items is often an issue which makes shopping close to cooking time important. Please be sure that the ingredients for your community kitchen recipes are being stored safely and at the appropriate temperature (refrigerated if necessary) after their purchase. You may even find some ingredients are available from someone's garden or cupboard.

Save all your receipts to make life easier when it comes time to divide the cost of food or just to keep a general accounting of cost per portion etc.

### • **The Cooking**

Groups cook together every week, every three weeks or once a month. Since cooking together means menu planning and shopping, groups who are making five meals to bring home often find it too much to cook once a week. They would rather cook a large amount of meals and cook less often. The majority of groups who cook once a week are sharing a fabulous meal together at that time. Little, if any, cooked meals are taken home. Regardless of how many meals your group is cooking at any given time, meal preparation and sharing is a rewarding group activity. Your group is gathered in the kitchen and ready to go. Establishing a few basic steps will not only increase the group's effectiveness and success rate but will also increase the overall level of knowledge and skill within your kitchen.

1. Get your group to read the recipes out loud. This might seem obvious but many people are in such a rush to get their hands dirty that they never actually go over what they are about to do. Familiarizing the entire group with each recipe will allow you to clear up any problems ahead of time. How many times have you poured the cake batter into the pan but forgot to turn on the oven?
2. Divide up the tasks. Determine who will be working on what recipe.
3. Prepare workstations. Gather all the ingredients, utensils and cooking/baking equipment that will be needed for each recipe and set up an area for which to work. For example, if you have a recipe that requires use of the stove, perhaps it might be convenient for that person to work on the counter space right next to it. Do you have all the ingredients?
4. Lastly, each participant should be urged to read over the recipe again in order to have the information fresh in their minds. Don your aprons, wash your hands and let the cooking begin!

### • **Your Kitchen Ready to Operate**

While it is lovely to stock your kitchen with equipment and tools right away, for some of us, this is not possible for a variety of reasons. In regards to the kitchen at the Vancouver Food Bank, we stocked it as we needed it. For example, the first cooking session we hosted we made sure we had the appropriate equipment necessary to cook the five recipes planned. That gave us more time to collect donated items or items at a better price. As our cooking sessions increased so did our kitchen equipment inventory. As mentioned

this method gives more time for donations to come in or to find the best price on the higher ticket items. Please keep in mind cross-cultural cooking that requires different tools and equipment. Review this list for recommendations on basic equipment at [http://www.communitykitchens.ca/ckfinder/userfiles/files/pdfs/equip\\_needed.pdf](http://www.communitykitchens.ca/ckfinder/userfiles/files/pdfs/equip_needed.pdf)

If you are building or renovating your community based kitchen and you looking for kitchen design ideas, take a look at some suggestions by local community kitchens at <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/ckfinder/userfiles/files/pdfs/Kitchen Layout.pdf>

#### • **Evaluate**

After a few cooking sessions, it's a good idea to have your participants share their perspective about the cooking process. *What do they like? What do they think isn't working?* You can do an evaluation by having a group discussion or by having them complete an evaluation form. Evaluating your cooking program can also provide invaluable information that you can share with your supervisor or funder. You can see some samples of other community kitchen evaluation forms for ideas at <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/?en&CKToolkit#Evaluation>

#### • **Getting Funding and Support**

Getting funding for a community kitchen is one of our top questions. We have some suggestions listed on our website. At <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/?en&GettingFunding>

#### • **For More Information**

For more handouts and worksheets that can help you setup your community kitchen, take a look at our [Community Kitchen Toolkit](#) or search our [Tools and Resources](#) database.