

The Grow Dat Youth Farm: Design-building a Non-Profit

Scott Bernhard
Tulane University

Emilie Taylor
Tulane University

Although a clear and singular definition of social entrepreneurship has yet to be agreed upon, many accept the term to apply to organizations in service of a social mission while drawing upon both revenue positive business models and socially oriented, non-profit strategies. In general, social entrepreneurship is characterized by a continuous process of learning and adapting - appropriating and testing a broad range of unconventional inputs to solve social problems. Optimal outcomes in these ventures address pressing and ongoing societal needs without generating cycles of dependence on continued philanthropy or subsidy. Though it may seem self-evident to architects and environmental designers, this recursive process of continual learning (as well as the open embrace of models from many sources) is quite like the design process at its best. Likewise, components of the built environment that continue to serve a social or cultural purpose with little need for extensive maintenance regimes and endless cycles of consumption and waste, are construction in its most sustainable form.

This research and consequent design-build project demonstrate how a group of faculty and students from a range of design and engineering disciplines converged to create an educational non-profit and an urban agriculture facility to support a social mission. Both the facility and the organization were created and deployed in the field by the same group of young architects and designers. The fit between the facility (designed by students and faculty) and the organization it supports (also created by the faculty and students) was thus developed in a recursive feedback loop with numerous instances of continual learning and adaptation that greatly improved the architectural outcome. The resulting 6000 square foot urban agriculture facility on a 4 acre site serves as a model for award-winning environmentally-conscious design, innovative reuse of construction materials, environmental remediation, sophisticated water management, progressive land conservation techniques and successful social entrepreneurship through mission driven design, programing and revenue generating building elements.

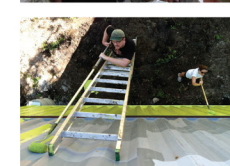
Though many design build projects engage non-profit clients, the process here was to build the nonprofit, its program and its facility simultaneously over a three-year period of looping and overlapping coursework and professional collaborations. Over a five semester period more than sixty architecture students, four faculty (two architects, one ecologist and one landscape architect), and seven different engineering, non-profit and agriculture consultants were involved in the process. Students participated in every aspect of design and construction, functioning as the designers, contractors, laborers, and post-occupancy evaluators. The non-profit organization was developed in sync with the facility, including a pilot year in an existing facility that offered insights into the preliminary assumptions about the spatial needs and the operational exigencies of the non-profit. We believe this process is unprecedented in higher education design-build and was of enormous value as a learning experience and in the success of the final project.

This paper and presentation will describe the process of design through the lens of social entrepreneurship in this unique instance of a truly comprehensive design effort. Architects and architecture students became effective agents of social change.



GROW DAT YOUTH FARM

City Park, New Orleans



Grow Dat Youth Farm's mission is to nurture a diverse group of young leaders through the meaningful work of growing food. With the goal of producing healthy food for local residents and to inspire youth and adults to create personal, social and environmental change in their own communities, Grow Dat is a place where people from different backgrounds and disciplines come together in research and practice to support public health, local economies and a sustainable food system in South Louisiana. Grow Dat creates a healthy and supportive work environment for high school-aged youth from New Orleans who face limited job opportunities.

Grow Dat's pilot year was launched at Hollygrove Market and Farm in January 2011. In the Spring of 2012, farming at the permanent site at City Park began, and the Grow Dat Organization moved into their City Park campus in the Fall of 2012.

The farm's four acre site was designed and built over the course of three semesters. The Grow Dat campus includes a classroom space, offices, a kitchen, cold storage, food prep, and additional support spaces. These spaces are created with and defined by repurposed shipping containers, a common industrial product in our port city. The campus is designed to have minimal impact on the site, and there is a comprehensive water management plan which includes grey water filtration tanks, composting toilets, and a large swale.

