

LESSON 4

Financially Sustaining your Garden Program

Monetary and in-kind donations can help build a garden's infrastructure and teaching resources, and can even help pay for a garden coordinator's salary. It is ideal when a school district or community partner incorporate the gardening program into the budget. The respective school or agency will likely cover the garden maintenances, but it will still be helpful to find donations of materials and supplies for the garden. These kinds of in-kind donations can be an easy way for businesses and individuals to contribute to the project. It can also further benefit the garden by allowing contributors, small or large, to become involved and invested in the garden. Fundraising can be intimidating, so the purpose of this lesson is to provide concrete strategies and sources for acquiring the resources you need for the garden.

Learning Objectives

1. Learn general guiding principles for finding funds.
2. Identify a variety of possible funding sources.
3. Learn a variety of strategies for requesting funds.

Guiding Principles for Fundraising Success

The following are overarching ideas to keep in mind and ongoing practices that will help you have fundraising success for your school gardening program. As a practical point, always remember to check with school administrators regarding any regulations on using donations.

1. **Don't be afraid to ask:** If you don't ask, you won't get the donation. As an organizing group, be creative and thorough in brainstorming a list of possible donors, including friends, gardeners, neighbors, faith communities, local businesses (both garden related and not), and nonprofits. Include companies that might donate a particular item (such as unused seeds from a seed company or lumber from a home improvement store), in addition to or instead of money. Be creative about what you need. For example, pumpkin patches in the city might have hay bales to donate after Halloween.
2. **Be patient, persistent, and polite:** Funds may not pour in overnight, so it's important to have patience and keep trying. Follow up with potential donors by phone about a week after your initial request if you haven't heard a response. It's okay to keep in touch with people and businesses who initially turned you down and make a second request a year or more later. Always be polite in all interactions, both formal and informal, with donors and potential donors. Always say thank you regardless of the response to your request.
3. **Present organization and care:** Present organization and care in yourself, the gardening program, and the donation needs. People generally wish to donate to a cause when they are confident that their donations will be used carefully and for a purpose they support. It therefore helps to communicate the gardening program goals, target audience, benefits, and needs in an attractive, appealing way. A sloppy presentation or brochure does not instill confidence in donors even if your goals are commendable.
4. **Take photos:** Take photos regularly and even at special events; photos can go a long way toward making your garden appealing to potential donors. Assign the photography role to one or more garden organizers and teachers who are interested. Remember to take some "before" photos when you're starting the garden and/or making garden additions, since it's fun to see and display positive changes. Take photos of children engaging in the garden. Photos can be used in garden promotional materials (brochures, etc), on a garden website or blog, on Facebook, and printed and displayed at the garden.
5. **Do your homework on possible funders:** Before ever applying for any particular source of funds, find out as much as you can about that funder. Look around the website and/or talk to connected people to find out what



the funder has funded in the past, particular areas of interest, information on board members and/or key staff and funding ranges. Also, pay attention to key words and phrases used on the funder's website or application- it never hurts to use these in your application (without plagiarizing, of course.)

Funding Sources

The key is to be creative when brainstorming possible funding sources, but here are a few places to start.

1. Local garden stores, nurseries, irrigation suppliers, lumber stores, bookstores, hardware stores, and other businesses are great sources for materials and expertise.
2. Local farmers, garden clubs and other gardening experts can provide expertise and donated time in the garden.
3. Parents and community members may donate money, supplies, or time.
4. School foundation- some schools have associated foundations that are separate from the PTO. They may be willing to fundraise for your school garden or allocate some of their budget, and they may have talented grant writers.
5. Community service groups (like Kiwanis or Rotary) and local companies might have dedicated funds available for donations to projects like yours and/or a ready team of volunteers to help with a one-day project.
6. The school's PTO/PTA can be a powerful supporter for the garden, with funds, volunteer support, advocacy, etc. Remember that a particular PTO can only make commitments for a single school year; they're not able to commit the future PTO group to anything.
7. Granting organizations such as foundations can be a source for larger sums of money. The San Diego Master Gardeners has one of the most up-to-date grant calendars with grants specifically for school gardens:
www.mastergardenerssandiego.org/schools/grants.php



Fundraising Strategies

Using a variety of fundraising approaches rather than a single approach will increase your success in fundraising. Just like an organic garden relies on diversity of plants to have a strong, resilient system, diversity in fundraising approaches will create more chances to appeal to your potential donors. The following are the types of approaches you might use:

1. **Face-to-face requests:** For all of the possible local funding sources listed above try to make face-to-face requests whenever possible. Meeting with a person, either an individual or a representative of a company or organization, makes the request feel more personal. During a meeting, the potential donor has an opportunity to ask questions, and you can convey your friendliness and competence. Anyone who is confident, outgoing and polite can get good at this kind of interaction with a little practice.
2. **Mailed requests:** Direct mail requires that you create an appealing, simple donation-request packet to mail to potential donors (you could also bring this along to personal meetings). The packet should include a personalized request letter, a wish list, and a brochure on the project with goals and photos of students using the garden or the garden site if it's just starting. It should also outline recognition packages available to sponsors for their donations, such as placement of their logo on the school garden sign or verbal acknowledgement at special events. Develop a schedule to call or email potential funders if you have not yet heard back from them after a week.

3. **Grant proposals:** Grant writing takes research to target likely grantors, careful writing, time, persistence, and repeated attempts, but it can yield high payoffs. Depending on the size of the grant, it can be worth the energy to apply. Grantors that fund school gardens enjoy seeing photographs of the garden being used, student art, writing and general learning from this experience; be sure to include these in applications and reporting, as some grants will refund the following year. There are many excellent references that support grant writing, although for many of the smaller grants the personal touch is more important than the background research and data. For good recommendations check out *The Only Grant-Writing Book you'll Ever Need* by Ellen Karsh and Arlen Sue Fox. theonlygrantwritingbook.com/?p=2

4. **Events:** Special events at the garden can help raise funds and friends who may want to offer a donation. A few fundraiser ideas include: vegetable and/or plant start sales, craft sales, garden cookbooks or art, benefit concerts, lectures and workshops, auctions, raffles of donated items, garden tours, and harvest festivals. Students can be a great resource and help in the event; make sure to include them when appropriate. For example, students can be responsible for leading garden tours or creating cookbooks. Be careful not to overspend on events or wear out your organizing group with all of the logistics, though. You want to make sure there's a reasonable payoff for the effort spent. Make it easy to donate at the event, with a donation can or box. The more your event is tied to the garden's mission, the greater likelihood of success.

References

1. Karsh, E. and A.S. Fox. 2003.

The Only Grant-writing Book You'll Ever Need:

Top Grant Writers and Grant Givers Share Their Secrets. New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers.

2. San Diego Master Gardeners.

"Calendar of grants available to school gardens."

Available at: www.mastergardenerssandiego.org/schools/grants.php

