

# Fundraising for Success

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To assist your community or school garden in developing sustainability, consider these three questions:

Is your garden ready to form a steering committee to provide coordination and leadership?

Can your garden rely primarily on donated supplies, materials, and volunteer labor?

Is your garden interested in seeking grants and/or ways to generate earned income?

The way in which your group answers these questions will influence the organizational development of your garden program and its evolving leadership structure.

## **Getting Started/Thinking Ahead Stage:**

For most community or school garden projects, the general rule of thumb is to start small and operate the garden on a non-cash basis for the first year or two. Here are some basic strategies:

- 1) Get approval and a pledge of support from the landowner before starting the garden; then renew this pledge of support each year. In the case of a school garden, administrative support is vital.
- 2) Scavenge materials for your garden such as stakes, compost, containers, and lumber.
- 3) Borrow tools and equipment from friends and participants.
- 4) Form a steering committee to plan, make decisions, and secure in kind contributions of materials, publicity, and volunteer labor.
- 5) Secure donations of garden supplies, seeds, plants, and tools from local businesses.
- 6) Apply for mini-grants available to ad hoc groups for specific materials and services.
- 7) Enlist help from Master Gardeners and community volunteers of all ages. For school gardens, be sure that fellow teachers and the custodian are involved in the planning process.
- 8) When seeking assistance, ask people for advice and suggest ways they can participate.

For school gardens, donations of cash and/or materials can be solicited on school letterhead with approval by the school administration. The school PTO may also supply some funds. Small grants for materials may also be applied for, with bookkeeping going through the PTO or business office.

For community gardens, it can help to have a fiduciary organization involved (a nonprofit, social service agency, or parks and recreation department) whose letterhead can be used to solicit materials and/or grants. The fiduciary organization acts as a fiscal agent for the garden project and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that funds raised are used for the intended purposes. Garden projects must seek and receive permission from the fiduciary organization when planning projects and raising funds.

## **Grassroots Fundraising/Budgeting Stage:**

In this stage of development, a garden project is on its feet and viewed positively by participants, administrators, and the community. Cash resources are needed to develop infrastructure and expand programs. The garden steering committee is ready to become more formally organized. For most projects, this is the middle stage in developing sustainability. Here are some strategies that can be used:

- 1) Brainstorm ideas and goals for the garden project. Be sure to include input from stakeholders (participants, teachers, administrators, and community members) to build a base of awareness and support for your project. Develop a project folder that includes a wish list for materials, staffing, and program supplies. Before fundraising begins, reach a consensus on how the funds raised will be used.
- 2) Consider grassroots fundraising ideas to generate income and build community support.
  - a) Bake sales, yard sales, coin drops, car washes, and bottle drives require limited cash outlays.
  - b) Fundraising programs, such as selling flower bulbs or T-shirts, require some cash outlay, but may generate higher returns and help build community support.
  - c) Silent auctions and raffles highlight community partnerships by securing promotional donations from local businesses. Sometimes auctions and raffles are combined with a dinner or special event.
  - d) Concessions sales of food and beverages provide exposure for your project at community sporting events and festivals. Food and paper products can often be secured through supermarket donations.
- 3) Prepare a realistic budget for the calendar year listing projected revenues and expenses. Plan ahead so that revenues are generated before expenses are incurred.
- 4) Open a cash account for your project with the fiduciary organization, PTO, or school business office, or appoint a treasurer and open a checking account (preferably with no minimum balance requirement or monthly fees). Create an accounting system for revenues and expenses, decide on the office location and mailing address for the garden project, and establish who has the authority to spend money from the checking account.
- 5) Try to start building a “nest egg” for unexpected expenses and to carry over from year to year. Keep this amount in reserve and add to it where possible.
- 6) Consider an entrepreneurial project such as a plant sale, or marketing cut flowers, fresh produce, salsa, herbal soaps, or garden crafts. Involve participants in all phases of the entrepreneurial venture.
- 7) Cultivate a team spirit around fundraising, set goals, and celebrate the results. Recognize and thank volunteers, donors, and sponsors whenever possible.

## **Institutional Fundraising /Permanence Stage**

In this stage of development, the garden steering committee seeks funding and institutional support to become a permanent part of the community. Perhaps the major infrastructure of the garden has been installed, and now it's time to enhance education and outreach programs, as well as maintaining

fences, raised beds, tools, equipment, and water lines. A deeper level of organizational support and commitment is needed beyond grassroots fundraising and small grants. Some groups evolve into nonprofit organizations, although this step is more complex from a legal and accounting standpoint. Groups interested in gaining nonprofit status will need to develop a clear mission and a detailed long term plan for sustainability. Read on for recommended strategies:

- 1) Together with your annual budget, develop a timeline and calendar of activities, steering committee meetings, fundraising efforts, work projects, and special events for the entire year. Try to involve participants in this process as much as possible.
- 2) Develop a plan for publicizing your garden to a wider audience. Work up a media list with the names and contact information for local newspapers, radio, and TV stations. Develop a relationship with local reporters and editors, send press releases, and invite the media to special events.
- 3) Create a brochure or project folder that describes your community or school garden program and provides interested supporters with information on how they can contribute.
- 4) Create a scrapbook that includes news articles, color photos of gardeners, letters of support, and dreams for the future. Make this scrapbook available for viewing at public gatherings, school open houses, library exhibits, and county fairs.
- 5) Start building a mailing list and email list of business people, parents, teachers, administrators, garden volunteers, community leaders, local nonprofit organizations, city and town officials, and legislators who support arts, education, and environmental programs.
- 6) Publish a newsletter, and/or write local news articles about your garden. Thank sponsors and contributors where appropriate. Make your goals, mission, and vision well known to readers.
- 7) Cultivate community partnerships with local social service agencies, nonprofits, garden clubs, 4-H clubs, Master Gardeners, scouting groups, service organizations, businesses, and conservation groups.
- 8) Research grants available from foundations and organizations that support community-based gardens, community development, and environmental education initiatives. Get advice from a professional fundraiser about grant sources and proposal writing strategies. For school gardens, obtain teacher and administration support for your plans before writing and submitting a grant proposal.
- 9) Redefine roles for steering committee members so that the areas of fundraising, publicity, program development, and garden maintenance each have leadership. Circulate meeting agendas in advance, record meeting minutes, and develop an effective communications system among committee members.
- 10) As your garden project grows, continue to seek input from participants and community members. Think about ways that your program can publicly give back to the community, perhaps by sharing produce with a food bank or by having a community harvest festival.
- 11) To maintain community support, consider changing some strategies from season to season, and from year to year. When you receive contributions of any kind, acknowledge your donors in word and print. Recognize and thank volunteers. Above all, keep the “fun” in fundraising, and your garden program will likely continue to attract new participants, volunteers, and contributors.