Fundraising Tips for Garden-Based Learning Programs

Get a group of educators together, begin to discuss program challenges, and it's inevitable: the topic of raising funds, not having enough funds, or a fear of lack of funding will probably surface.

Regardless of the scope or audience of your garden project, at some point you will likely have to raise funds or secure in-kind donations to support the creation and maintenance of the garden, or to advance facets of the garden program, particularly in today's financial climate. There are many strategies, ranging from grassroots approaches that involve lots of people while garnering relatively fewer funds, to grants that can provide significant dollars and that require writing skill. Improve your chances for success by employing several approaches.

There is tremendous "in-kind value" in the time that volunteers, teachers, parents, administrators and community members lend to the program effort. Here, however, we will focus on two approaches to raising monies and donations: grassroots fundraising and grant writing.

Grassroots Fundraising

From dollar drives to bake sales, this method is important since it doubles as a publicity opportunity, and can create a strong sense of ownership among all who contribute. One school brought the circus to town each year to raise money for the garden. This fundraiser generated about $1000 annually, and of course, provided an enjoyable venue for hundreds of families and community members, all of whom were investing in the garden while having a good time. Another community program created small, inexpensive bouquets and sold dozens of them in the highly visible foyer of the local supermarket for Mother's Day. Consider:

- These methods can be time and energy intensive.
- They are an excellent way to engage youth in the fundraising process, since young people can identify approaches, and follow through on each aspect of planning and completion.
- All community members can participate.
- Car washes, tag sales, bake sales, bottle drives, selling seeds, bulbs or seedlings, penny and dollar drives have proven to be successful. With multiple approaches, the funds can add up to something considerable. Don't forget the circus and other unique fundraising opportunities.
- This approach increases awareness, participation, and ownership among those who help or contribute.

Engaging Local Businesses

An important element of grassroots fundraising, donations from local businesses can make a significant impact on a program, and do require planning and coordination. It's wise to designate one person as a point of contact, so that businesses do not receive multiple requests, making your program appear disjointed. Sometimes stores have affiliated foundations to approach for materials; do your homework to find out. Some examples of requests:

- Plant, soil, and mulch donations from a nursery or garden center.
- Donation of a wheelbarrow, fencing or tools from a home improvement store.
- Monetary donation from a local bank.
- Refreshments provided by a grocery store or restaurant.
- Free rental of a rototiller and other tools.

Cornell University Department of Horticulture
Cornell Garden Based Learning

Fundraising Tips for Garden-Based Learning Programs

Before approaching businesses, we suggest creating a Project Folder

This concise packet of relevant program materials can be used to represent your program and its needs and can be left with a business for further review. Know your tax status and to whom checks should be written before you approach businesses. Consider including:

- Succinct, well written one-page description of your program.
- Letter of endorsement and support from the director, principal, or coordinator.
- Photo page, with drawings and statements from participants
- Garden plan or design.
- List of key project leaders, participants, and volunteers.
- Specific, realistic and concise list of your project needs.
- Contributors in the community to date.

Document and Share Your Accomplishments

All along the way, gather positive feedback, anecdotes, and evaluation data to highlight what you are doing well. There is an old fundraising adage that "money begets money." The more you can spread the news regarding the success of what you are doing, the more comfortable local businesses, private donors and others will feel about investing in a well-planned, known entity.

- Identify a point person with photography, video, and writing skills as a documentarian.
- Contact the local news for an article, and then, include it with your project folder.
- Apply for a community award, and publicize it when you receive it.
- Make a point of thanking everyone who participates or assists with your program.

Grant Applications

Grant writing is a way to secure larger funds and materials to develop your program. Since it can seem daunting, we encourage you to do your research, and first begin identifying small regional foundations or agencies that support projects in your location, county or state. Local arts-, environment-, or science-based agencies often work well as a jumping off point. Securing a small grant can grow confidence, and also provides demonstrated success in preparation for something larger. Consider:

- It is an important courtesy to notify all program personnel, from your director or principal, to grounds crew, prior to preparation and submission.
- Read all grant guidelines carefully and do not hesitate to call the agency to ask for clarification.
- Include all the information outlined in the grant guidelines.
- Be attentive to page limits, and be certain to send the number of copies requested.
- Be concise and highlight your strengths.
- Convey enthusiasm, that you are well organized, have clear goals and objectives, and are planning a sustainable project.
- Highlight the accomplishments you have made so far, as well as the strengths of your program.
- You may include current challenges if you have a clearly identified plan for overcoming them.

What no one ever tells you that's vital to your success

- Begin writing *early*, well before the deadline.
- Write, read, and revise. Ask for review from multiple parties and perspectives, and revise again before submission.
- Be courteous. Identify key people with different skill sets well in advance. Ask them to read through the grant and provide edits. Give them a realistic time frame to do so! Asking them the day before the proposal is due, which suggests that they work into the evening, is highly inconsiderate and does not reflect well on you or your program.

- Remember that *real* people read these proposals. Complicated wording and jargon only make a proposal difficult to read. Stick with the basics of who, what, when, where, how, and perhaps most importantly, why this is critical and who will benefit from it.
- Read through it and ask yourself: can you remove words, and still carry the same meaning? Then, begin to prune. Someone in our program once removed 1500 words from a proposal, and still said the same thing – except, it was much clearer.

Dealing with confusing grants language

Most proposals require a **rationale, background information, or justification**. These sections provide important background into the nature of your request, as well as the reasons as to why your proposal is so vital to the topic identified as critical by the organization, such as student achievement, youth engagement, building community economic capacity, and so forth.

Each section will provide specific information requested. In general, be certain that there is an **excellent connection between the goals of the funding agency, and what you are proposing**. Do your homework, and include research with citations.

Example excerpt: "Our school garden program began with an elementary school curriculum only. We recognize the importance of engaging a teen-aged audience in outdoor settings, as well as how teen-aged youth can benefit from interactions with other members of the school community (citing research to support this). As our program has grown and generated interest among older youth, more than 20 young people have inquired about opportunities for a well-planned youth leadership project, in which they would gain the community service credits required by our school for graduation, by serving as mentors to children in the garden setting. We propose to create a new, well-planned opportunity for young people to engage in the decision-making process with adult leaders, and to become youth leaders of elementary-aged children, through a series of deliberately staged activities (which you describe concretely in the **activities or methods section of the proposal**). Research has shown that gardening interest is strongly correlated with decision-making among children and youth (and then cite it). We plan for further foster this interest among school children and their older youth mentors through…."

You can find examples of research to support your work here:
http://blogs.cornell.edu/garden/grow-your-program/research-that-supports-our-work/

Be certain that your objectives are measurable, and that they **align with your intended outcomes**. You only need three to six well written objectives. Too many may be difficult to assess and follow through with.

To practice, write one objective ("To teach youth leaders how to effectively engage the interest of third grade children in gardening activities.")

First ask, **can you measure it to evaluate your effectiveness in achieving this objective?** How? (Yes, by observing, surveying, and/or interviewing children and youth.)

Now, take the words **"as a result of"** and place it at the beginning of your objective. This will illuminate the related outcomes. Be as specific as you can. Here are some examples

Fundraising Tips for Garden-Based Learning Programs

As a result of providing opportunities for youth leaders to engage with third graders…

- 10 youth will learn garden-based learning activities to teach to school children.
- After participating in an Act for Youth training, 10 youth will demonstrate leadership competencies, will increase in self-confidence, and learn effective communication strategies.
- Youth will have opportunities to display their newly acquired leadership skills in other areas of the school setting identified as critical by a committee on teen behavior, including the school cafeteria, outdoor recreation area, and during assembly.
- 75 third graders will be inspired by the opportunity to interact with older youth mentors, increasing their interest in the garden and in serving as youth leaders in the future.
- Youth leaders and third grade students will take home lessons learned and begin family gardening at home.
- Teachers will have capable assistance in the garden, allowing them to focus their attention on involving students in planning the newly forming wildlife habitat.
- Administrators will observe demonstrated successes and provide continued support for the garden.

As you can see, one clear objective can generate a number of positive outcomes to choose from. You need not list all of them; these illuminate the possibilities. The important point: focused, clear, measurable, and aligned.

Where to go from here?
We encourage you to begin by searching for regional foundations, or local businesses that may have affiliate foundations, such as Lowe's, Target or the Wegman's Family. Try different search terms, starting with familiar names for your region (e.g. Finger Lakes Region, Central New York) and adding terms such as foundation, funding agency. You can begin to focus your search with other terms (e.g. health, environment, arts, children, youth). Depending on your locale, "gardening" may be too narrow. A dedicated search will surface some local opportunities. For example, some programs in Central NY have benefited greatly from the generosity of the small and vibrant John Ben Snow Foundation.

As you grow in confidence there are larger foundations that offer rolling or continued opportunities to apply. Some websites and programs keep lists of agencies for fundraising. School Garden Wizard, the California School Garden Network and The North American Association for Environmental Education offer fundraising guidance and/or lists of fundraising opportunities.

Explore these as possibilities (search for them on-line; we do not include web addresses, since they occasionally change):

- Annie's Grants for Gardens is ongoing (no deadline to apply)
- The Bay and Paul Foundation
- Delta Airlines Foundation
- Toyota Tapestry Grant Foundation
- Dreyer's Foundation
- American Honda Foundation
- National Gardening Association Youth Garden Grants
- Check the California School Garden Network for granting opportunities.

We wish you the best of luck!

Fundraising Tips for Garden-Based Learning Programs

Ideas for Grassroots fundraising include…

Planning ahead for grant writing

Over-arching goal statement:

We propose to create a new, well-planned opportunity for young people to engage in the decision-making process with adult leaders, and to become youth leaders of elementary-aged children, through a series of deliberately staged activities.

Clear, measurable objectives:

Fundraising Tips for Garden-Based Learning Programs

To teach youth leaders how to effectively engage the interest of third grade children in gardening activities.

Link those two measurable objectives to intended outcomes, by writing the words, 'as a result of…' in front of the statement:

As a result of providing opportunities for youth leaders to engage with third graders…

- 10 youth will learn garden-based learning activities to teach to school children.
- 75 third graders will be inspired by the opportunity to interact with older youth mentors, increasing their interest in the garden and in serving as youth leaders in the future.