

Determining Garden Program Goals

You've put together an awesome team and you are ready to organize your ideas into a design and dig in, but there is still one more very important planning step to accomplish. Your garden committee needs to compile all the ideas collected from key players and craft a set of written goals and objectives for your school garden program. Undoubtedly, you will already have a sense of what you hope the garden program will accomplish and what you want to plant. However, it is important to turn these abstract thoughts into concrete goals and objectives. Your goals will guide your design and serve as a measure for success. Having them written down helps you communicate them to others (not only to the involved key players but also potential sponsors), and it also helps you stay focused throughout the installation process.

Crafting Goals for the Garden Program

Your goals should tell you who, what, where, how, and why. Below you will find a series of questions designed to help you begin refining your ideas into solid goals.

- **Who will participate in the garden program?**

Will the program be open to all grade levels? Focus on one grade level? Will one class take responsibility for the garden or will numerous classes share the space? Will after-school or summer school students be involved? Neighbors? Community members?

- **What do you hope to accomplish through the garden program?**

Do you want students to gain an appreciation for food origins? Do you want them to learn how to harvest and prepare fresh fruits and vegetables? Do you want to see an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption in the cafeteria? Do you want to grow enough food to be able to serve it in the cafeteria or host a farmers' market?

- **How will the garden program fit into your existing curriculum?**

Will the garden be used to teach one subject or multiple topics? Can you use gardening activities to teach any of your required curriculum standards? Does the garden complement any other existing activities offered at the school?

- **How will you conduct the garden program?**

How will you involve your key players in the implementation of the garden? How will teachers, cafeteria staff, and parents all work together to accomplish your goals? How will you maintain the garden throughout the year? Who will care for it during school breaks?

- **Why is the garden the best tool for reaching your goals?**

How do you think a garden program will benefit your students? What makes the garden special?

There is no magic number of goals to set as you devise your plan of action, but keep them realistic, specific, and as concise as possible. For each goal, identify key objectives to implement that will help you achieve success. Establish an evaluation process that includes benchmarks for measuring your progress. Finally, remember that even with the most thoughtful planning at the outset, implementing a garden program is a dynamic process. Keep your goals flexible to accommodate changing circumstances as they arise. Make a point to review your goals annually and revise or add to them as needed.