

# CHAPTER 3

## Funding Your School Food Garden

Funding is one of the most commonly cited challenges for both new and established school food garden programs. While the prospect of raising funds to start up or sustain a school garden may seem daunting, there are many ways to acquire materials and funds to help you meet your needs. Fundraising can also provide opportunities for learning and help develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the garden on the part of students, caregivers, and volunteers. Successful kids' gardening programs frequently incorporate several strategies rather than relying on one source of funding to cover all expenses.



In this chapter you'll find ideas and tips for funding your school food garden. By the end of this chapter you should be able to answer the questions:

- What do I need to do before beginning my funding search?
- What are some common sources for funding and donations to support my school food garden?

### Before You Begin

Estimate the supply needs and costs for the entire project. By preparing a realistic budget you'll have a good fundraising target. Remember to include expenses for site development and improvement, routine maintenance, curriculum materials, and miscellaneous items.

Create policies and procedures for handling money and donations. Consider setting up an account for your project with the PTO or school business office to facilitate the process. If your program cannot fall under the supervision of an existing organizational structure, you may need to establish a new garden committee with executive positions and bylaws to provide you with the oversight needed to handle funds and allow you to open a checking account. Whether you fall under an existing organization or a new one, create a record-keeping system for revenues and expenses and establish who has the authority to collect and spend money.

## Common Fundraising Strategies

Here are some ways to obtain supplies and materials:

### Request Donations

Seek product and monetary donations from your support network and the community through a direct appeal. Although asking in person is best, you may also request donations by letter, email, or by posting requests through communication outlets such as bulletin boards (physical or electronic), websites, newsletters, newspapers, or Facebook. When asking for donations, be very specific about your needs. Remember that individuals and businesses receive requests for donations all the time, so be professional, organized, and detailed. Be prepared to provide information to support the size of your requests for cash or materials. It is helpful to have an official letter or a program folder that provides details about your program to share with potential donors. Your existing support network has the strongest investment and understanding of your program needs, so they are often your biggest financial supporters too.

Your support network may have limited resources; however, there are many other ways to raise funds, such as these ideas we collected from school garden educators around the country:

### Apply for Grants

There are many grants from both local and national foundations and other organizations that support initiatives in school and youth gardens (and specifically food or edible

garden programs), community development, and environmental education. You can begin your search by joining the free Kids Garden Community which has an [up-to-date list of grant opportunities](#) provided by KidsGardening and other garden-related national grant and award opportunities. When seeking this type of funding, remember that most grant programs are very competitive, and the number of applications is always far greater than the number of grants available. Check out KidsGardening's [Grant Writing Tips handout](#) to learn what makes a strong grant application. Do not be discouraged if some of your applications are not successful; just keep trying.

**“Plain and simple, the kid’s love to dig in the dirt and learn while doing it. Any gardening activity and other nature-based inquiry gets the students excited about learning and piques their curiosity.”**



— PATRICK MURPHY

SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE CHILDCARE CENTER, MT

### Crowdfund

Crowdfunding is a term broadly used to describe fundraising efforts focused on raising smaller amounts of money from large numbers of people, frequently through online and social media efforts. It allows you reach beyond your immediate support network. Many online platforms offer help with crowdfunding, such as GoFundMe and



Crowdrise. SeedMoney is a crowdfunding platform focused on raising funds for food gardens. Unlike other platforms, SeedMoney doesn't charge a service fee, and they also offer challenge grants. Another helpful service is Donors Choose, which provides opportunities for educators to use crowdfunding to obtain donations of materials rather than money.

## Sell Garden-Related Items

Offer items and services for sale, such as seeds, transplants, indoor plants, dried herbs and flowers, sachets, potpourri, fresh produce, zucchini bread, cut flowers, and certificates for an hour of weeding.

## Host a Silent Auction or Raffle

These fundraising opportunities highlight community partnerships by securing promotional donations from local businesses and individuals who may not have garden-related items to donate, but who can contribute products or talents which can then be turned into support for the garden program. Auctions and raffles can be combined with a dinner or special event.

## Hold a Spring Garden Sale

Sell plants started by the students or donated by local gardeners and nurseries.

## Request Funds from Internal Funding Sources

Request an annual allocation from your organization's budget and, if you are at a school, from PTO/PTA funds. If your garden is a vital part of the organization's infrastructure; is actively championed by staff, educators, volunteers, caregivers, and kids; and features

permanent structures, such as raised beds, fences, and sheds, you will have a clear case to be eligible to receive such funding. If fundraising for a school garden, emphasize the connection between the garden and curriculum and how the garden program will address local, state, and national standards and frameworks.

## Create a Sponsor Program

Offers corporate donors specific recognition benefits. These may include acknowledgment of their contribution with a sign or banner at your garden or through your newsletter or on your website.

For more ideas, check out the Growing School Food Gardens webinar on [Funding Your School Garden Program](#).

## Fundraising Follow-Ups

Don't underestimate the power of keeping the community informed about your project for securing ongoing donations, involvement, and funds. Here are some tips for reaching out:

**Calendar** – Develop a detailed calendar of activities, committee meetings, fundraising efforts, work projects, and special events for the entire year and use that in your public relations efforts.

**Publicity** – Develop a plan for publicizing your garden to a broad audience. Compile a media list with contact information for local newspapers and radio and TV stations. Talk with reporters, send press releases, and invite the media to special events.

**Promotion** – Create a brochure, folder, or website that describes your project

and provides interested supporters with information on how they can contribute.

**Documentation** – Have students create a scrapbook that includes news articles, color photos of kids working in the garden, letters of support, and dreams for the future. Display this scrapbook at public gatherings, school open houses, library exhibits, and county fairs.

**Mailing list** – Start building a mailing list or email list of businesspeople, parents, teachers, administrators, garden volunteers, community leaders, local nonprofit organizations, city and town officials, and legislators who support arts, education, nutrition, and environmental programs for kids. Keep the members of this list informed about the gardening program and ask them for help when needed.

**Newsletter** – Publish a print or email newsletter about your program. Include a

section listing and thanking sponsors and contributors. Make your goals, mission, and wish list known to readers.

**Network** – Cultivate community partnerships with local garden clubs, 4-H clubs, Master Gardeners, scouting groups, service organizations, businesses, and conservation organizations.

## In Summary

A bit of creativity and ingenuity can go a long way in raising funds for your school food garden program. Begin by drawing on your immediate support network, but then cast your net broadly into your community. Don't be afraid to ask others to help meet your needs. Keep in mind that providing support for impactful programs can be a source of joy and pride for donors.

