



Promoting and supporting educational gardens for youth.

Grant Writing Resources and Tips

You have identified a grant for your school garden project, now what?

Here are some tips to help you achieve success when writing your grant applications from:

- KidsGardening
- The Edible Schoolyard Project
- Maine Philanthropy Center

Also don't forget to check out the [Financing Your School Garden](#) section on our website for more information about specific grants that school gardens are eligible for and review their suggestions and requirements before you begin so you know what information is required. You can do this!



Supports educators and caregivers bringing the life-changing benefits of gardening to kids. Offers grants to school gardens.

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GRANT WRITING TIPS

Grants are awards designed to provide funds or materials to support specific projects or programs. Funders typically have guidelines for award eligibility and an official application form. Some have deadlines for applications and others accept them throughout the year. It pays to research the background of the granting agency or foundation so you can make sure your objectives meet its goals. You can often find this information in a grant announcement, descriptions of previously funded projects, or annual reports.

Most granting organizations request at least the following types of information:

- goals
- objectives (outcomes)
- need statement
- project description
- evaluation (how you'll assess your success)
- budget

- (District or educational foundation grantors also typically want to know how the project will meet learning standards.)

Your proposal should convey enthusiasm, while also stressing the excellent organization and broad base of the gardening program. Most foundations are not interested in funding a short-term affair. You will probably be asked for documentation of strong leadership, community support, and the sustainability of your program. Emphasize why your project is unique and worthy of funding. Create a vivid image by describing what teachers and students will actually do and detailing the outcomes for students, teachers, and/or the community.

Be sure to follow these cardinal rules of grant seeking:

- Be certain you meet the grant funding criteria. Do not apply for grants that don't relate to your project.
- Follow all the guidelines detailed in the proposal.
- Make requests as short as possible. Real people have to read each proposal, so be concise.
- Make simple and straightforward requests. Do not assume complexity adds credibility.
- Avoid the following: acronyms and professional jargon, small type or a hard-to-read font, irrelevant appendix materials.
- Show appreciation when your organization receives a grant!
- Know when to quit. If rejected, it is appropriate to ask why, but do it in a way that leaves a good impression.
- Be a good non-winner. Do not argue with a foundation representative. Try again later with another project.



Provides lessons, recipes, publications from Alice Waters' foundation in Berkeley, CA

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Best Practices in Grant Writing

Grant giving organizations can provide restricted funding for a particular project or program or unrestricted funding to help cover the overhead costs of running the organization. This list shares strategies for successful grant writing and outlines the typical elements of a funding proposal.

Top Five Tips for Successful Grant Writing

1. *Only 7% of "cold" proposals are funded, so make yourself known.* Before writing anything to anyone, do your research on how well the grantmaking organization "fits" your vision. If there's a strong fit, then try to make direct contact with someone there to ask questions about their process and how much you can request.
2. *Review and follow the exact instructions described in the application.* If the foundation wants you to deliver five copies of each proposal, each with three staples across the top, and a budget written in fluorescent ink, to its office via camel in the middle of the night only on Leap Day every four years, then that's what you'll do. Not following directions is one of the primary reasons grants are not funded. Make a checklist and check it twice!
3. *Have a clear project budget.* Your budget should tie logically to the "How" activities described in your proposal. If the expenses don't match the activities, that can raise doubts about your ability to plan and carry out your project. Ask for help from a colleague, volunteer, or board member if you need it.
4. *Your familiarity can breed confusion for newcomers.* Have someone who is totally unfamiliar with your project read it and ask questions. Put the answers to those questions directly into your proposal—explain in detail anything that is unclear to someone who doesn't know your project as intimately as you do. And remember: beware the acronym!
5. *Proofread. Spellcheck.* Accept tracked changes. Leave time for careful review by two pairs of eyes. Seems simple, yet these kinds of careless mistakes are popular routes to the decline pile. Whenever possible, submit electronic documents in PDF format—and don't forget to take extra care with the spelling and grammar in email subject lines.

Typical Elements of a Funding Proposal

Executive Summary

The summary is a quick view for the funder to understand at a glance what you are seeking. At the beginning of a proposal, write a short summary of what you are proposing. The summary can be as short as a couple of sentences, but no longer than one page. Make sure it includes a brief description of the project, your organization's mission and vision, what makes you valuable, the amount you're requesting, and the timeframe in which you intend to use the grant.

Statement of Need

This is the meat of grant proposals; it's where you must convince the funder that what you propose to do is important and that your organization is the right one to do it. Assume that the reader does not know much about the issue or subject. Explain why the issue is important. It is also a good practice to have an overview of the population you serve: How many students? What are the demographics? What percentage of the student body qualifies for free and reduced lunch?

Goals and Objectives

What does your organization plan to do about the problem? This is the section where you outline your theory of change. How does the work you do solve the problem you are addressing? What will change as a result of this work? Spell out specific achievable

objectives and results that the grant support will enable you to carry out. Make sure to include the project timeline.

Methods and Strategies

Spell out *how* you will achieve the goals and objectives you've set out earlier. This can be in the form of a work plan or a bulleted list of action items that you and your team will accomplish.

Evaluation

How will you assess your program's accomplishments? How will you make sure this project is sustainable over time? Funders want to know that their dollars actually did some good. So decide now how you will evaluate the impact of your project. Include what records you will keep or data you will collect, and how you will use that data. If the data collection costs money, be sure to include that cost in your budget.

Budget

Any grant proposal or request should include a detailed budget for the project. It is important to build in staff time for meeting, planning, and executing the project, materials or capital expenses, and any other expenses you will incur over the course of the project. Many funders use the 5-50 rule of thumb to gauge whether their funding will make a significant impact, but not leave a program disproportionately reliant on their funds. So think about targeting grants that are no less than 5% and no more than 50% of your project's budget.

Other Sources of Funding

Have you gotten committed funds from other sources? Or have you asked other sources? Most funders do not wish to be the sole or primary source of support for a project. Be sure to mention in-kind contributions you expect, such as meeting space or equipment. Is this a pilot project with a limited timeline? Or will it go into the future? If so, how do you plan to fund it over time? How will you sustain it over the long haul? Do you have a diverse range of types of support and a strategy for gaining support (direct and in-kind) from different kinds of givers?

Organizational Information

In a few paragraphs, explain what your organization does and why the funder can trust it to use the requested funds responsibly and effectively. Give a short history of your organization: State its mission, the population it serves, and an overview of its track record in achieving its mission. Describe or list your programs and the background of program leadership. Be complete in this part of your proposal even if you know the funder or have gotten grants from this grantmaker before. If space allows, here's where you might add an anecdote/story of success that shows the power of the project's impact.

Cover Letter

The cover letter is best written once you have all the other pieces in place. It is a good practice to make sure the letter is formatted beautifully, as this is the first impression your donors will have. The cover letter is also a good place to remind readers of previous funding, conversations, or other specifics of your professional relationship.

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You are eligible to benefit from the resources at the Maine Philanthropy Center in Portland. Not only do they offer online tutorials to help you navigate their database of grants, you can also schedule a time to go into their office to review their materials.



[Visit Site](#)

The Maine Philanthropy Center’s non profit programs offer staff, trustees, and volunteers of nonprofit organizations the opportunity to improve their skills around grantseeking and being effective in their communications with funders.

They offer monthly grant research tutorials that are remote and free to the public and are a great opportunity to learn more about grant research. They also include day-long access to the Director of Grantmakers. You can register through their website

www.mainephilanthropy.org/events/nonprofit.

If you cannot attend one of the tutorials, email mpc@mainephilanthropy.org or call (207) 780-5039 to schedule a time to come into their office located in room 321 of the USM Glickman Family Library in Portland, ME including MPC’s Directory of Maine Grantmakers and Candid’s Foundation Directory Online. Office hours are M - F 9am - 4:30 pm. Please contact them *in advance to schedule* an appointment to ensure that someone is available to assist you.

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Questions? Email the Maine School Garden Network at info@msgn.org.