



OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

District School Garden Funding Guidance

Raising Funds for a Garden Project

There are many different ways school gardens are funded and for many school garden programs, funds come from multiple sources.

1. Creating a multi-year budget can be useful to gauge how much the garden program will cost over time and help to identify the best funding source. For example, the cost of starting a new garden program, which often includes the one-time cost of installing a school garden, is much higher than the cost of sustaining the garden over subsequent years.
2. After completing a budget, the next step is to develop a funding plan that is both realistic and manageable and includes identifying the right funding sources for the project. To learn more about planning and funding a school garden programs, check out the [Funding School Garden Work](#) resource created by the National School Garden Support Organization Network.
3. Create an easily accessible archive of grant applications. Many grants and foundations ask the same questions year after year and do not have a limit to the number of times an organization or school can be awarded.
4. To improve grant-writing skills, consider signing up for the [DC Government's Grant Proposal Writing Class](#), which can be viewed online.
5. Seek feedback on applications that are not funded; this feedback can not only help improve the application for the following years, it can also demonstrate to investors the level of investment and interest.
6. Raising start-up funds is important but ensuring that the program receives ongoing funding is vital. Check out the [School Garden Program Sustainability and Finances](#) webinar and the [Models for Financial Program Sustainability](#) best practices document by the School Garden Support Organization Network to learn more about this important aspect of funding a garden program.
7. Invite potential and existing funders to garden workdays, events, and other garden activities.
8. Develop a process for requesting and thanking funders. Cards with pictures of kids in the garden are always appreciated.

Typical Funding Needs

People often ask, “How much does a school garden program cost?” The answer is: it depends. Many questions need to be answered before funding can be determined, including:

- How will the garden be staffed?
- What are the design and construction needs?
- What is the size of the garden?
- What resources are already available?
- What level of student engagement are you hoping to achieve?
- How will the community be involved?

The average annual budget for a school garden program in the District is approximately \$17,334; however, budgets vary widely between programs based on responses to the questions above and can range from \$300 to \$80,000 (2018 Healthy Schools Act Report, 2018). Typical line-item costs for a school garden are outlined below.

- Staffing
 - Staffing is typically most of a school garden program's budget. Whenever possible the best way to sustain a school garden program is to raise funds for an onsite full time or part-time staff member dedicated to the development of the program and the maintenance of the garden. Another staffing strategy is providing stipends to teachers, school staff, parents and community members. This formalizes the commitment of stakeholders and allows them additional time to run after school garden clubs, perform maintenance tasks, community engagement activities such as workdays, or to develop garden-based lessons. Staff can spend additional time maintaining the garden, coordinating teachers, and provide garden-based professional development. For more information on funding staffing, check out the [School Garden Staff Models and Job Descriptions](#) resource.
- Garden Materials and Maintenance
 - The cost of materials and maintenance will vary depending on the size, type, and age of your garden. Materials to build the site infrastructure (for example, a shed, water systems, raised beds, shade, tables) are often the biggest cost and may include a contractor to design and build the garden. Garden tools and classroom supplies are typically included in this category. Many materials can be found for free or discounted rates for schools. Review the [District School Garden Care Directory](#) for more information. When starting a new garden project, consider:
 - How the lifespan of materials and the cost of replacement of these materials will impact the project's budget in future years.
 - Using easy-to-obtain, affordable materials will make it easier to repair and replace key infrastructure down the line.

- The function of each item, and if the function serves the purpose of the garden program. For example, it may be really exciting to construct a greenhouse, but how will this structure be used? Who will maintain it? What will the ongoing costs be? What purpose will it serve?
- Outdoor Classroom
 - The cost of an outdoor classroom space will vary dramatically depending on if it's permanent or temporary. Permanent spaces require permits, design and construction fees, and expensive materials. Temporary spaces can be constructed in existing shaded spaces built from available natural materials. Some programs rely on a pop-up tent that is pulled out of the storage shed when needed. Seating can be either fixed or flexible, depending on the site, but should easily accommodate up to 35 students, or whatever size group the program anticipates taking out to the garden at one time. The outdoor classroom area may include elements such as an outdoor kitchen and/ or science lab. See [the Design Guidelines for Outdoor Classrooms and School Gardens](#) document and [pictures of District outdoor classroom structures](#) for more information.
- Community Engagement
 - An important aspect of a well-integrated school garden is community engagement; however, it is often overlooked in program budgets. Building relationships with parents, students, teachers, or neighbors; creating and maintaining systems to manage volunteers; and hosting events such as annual celebrations, community workdays and school events take a significant amount of time.
- Professional Development
 - The cost of professional development is dependent on the scope, provider, and number of teachers participating. For more information on professional development models, check out the webinar [on How to Structure Impactful School Garden Professional Development](#).

Tips for Finding Funding

Many funding opportunities become available around the same time each year; therefore, it can be helpful to create a funding calendar to flag when applications open and close, and plan for adequate time to compose and submit a great proposal. Review the External Funding Sources for School Gardens section below to find funding sources, or for some creative funding ideas, check out the [four ways to use social enterprise to sustain your school garden](#).

The most common funding sources that support school garden programs are:

- Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) funds;

- School funds;
- School district funds;
- Local funds;
- Regional funds;
- Foundations and private grants;
- Crowdfunding; and
- In-kind donations.

Local Funding

Below is a list of local funding resources that are available to support school gardens:

[The Funding Alert](#) is an electronic bulletin produced by the District of Columbia Office of Partnerships and Grants Services and provides up to date information on grants. Consider registering for the weekly electronic bulletin to remain up-to-date on the latest competitive grant opportunities.

The [OSSE Grants Forecast Tool](#) provides information about OSSE grants including general information about funding and application timelines.

[RiverSmart Schools](#) The District Department of Energy and Environment, Watershed Protection Division offers funding and training to schools selected through this schoolyard conservation site program. This program consists of innovative schoolyard greening projects within the Anacostia Watershed which focus on incorporating landscape design principles that create habitat for wildlife, emphasize the use of native plants, highlight water conservation, and/or retain and filter stormwater runoff while having the added benefits of an outdoor classroom that supports effective teaching practices and promotes student learning.

Funding Databases

Looking for more funding opportunities? Below is a list of funding resources for school garden programs:

- [KidsGardening Grant Opportunities](#)
- [Seed Your Future Plant Education Grant Resources](#)
- [LifeLab Budgeting and Funding](#)