

Assignment 4: Program Plan Proposal

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Concept

McDowell County, West Virginia has one of the highest food insecurity rates in the state (PolicyMap, 2023), and a significant portion of adults in McDowell County eat less than one serving of fruits and vegetables per day (PolicyMap, 2017). Parts of the county are considered Limited Supermarket Access Areas, forcing the residents in those areas to travel a significantly longer distance to reach a full-service supermarket (PolicyMap, 2022). I am proposing that McDowell Public Library should start a seed library to help combat these issues.

A seed library is a collection of free fruit, vegetable, and flower seeds that members of the public can borrow and plant. As the season ends, patrons are asked to collect seeds from the plants they grew and return the seeds to the library. In this initiative, McDowell Public Library will create and stock a seed library, purchase gardening and seed saving books to add to their collection, offer workshops on these topics, and celebrate the opening of the seed library with a kickoff event. By making seeds and basic gardening information available at a community hub like McDowell Public Library, this program will help address the county's food access issues while promoting self-sufficiency and healthy eating habits.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the seed library is to encourage McDowell County residents to grow their own fresh produce, reducing barriers to food access and promoting fruit and vegetable consumption. While McDowell Public Library does not list their mission statement anywhere, we can assume that like any library, their core values include access, equity, and public good (American Library Association, n.d.). By offering educational resources, workshops, and free seeds, the library will meet the needs of their community, demonstrating their commitment to providing opportunities for growth and learning for everyone and dismantling systemic barriers.

Objectives & Outcomes

Objectives

1. Within the first year, the seed library will distribute at least 500 seed packets to members of the community.
2. The library will host at least six educational workshops on topics such as beginner gardening and seed saving.
3. At the end of the season, at least 50% of respondents will report increased fruit and vegetable consumption. OR At the end of an educational workshop, at least 50% of respondents will report increased knowledge of gardening and seed saving techniques.

Outcomes

For individuals, the seed library initiative will hopefully lead to increased fruit and vegetable consumption and increased gardening skills. The initiative will hopefully help improve community food insecurity and reduce community reliance on inaccessible grocery stores.

Target Audience

The seed library can be enjoyed by all ages, but adults are the primary audience. A vast majority of residents within a five-mile radius of McDowell Public Library are adults under the age of 64, and only 0.65% of the population is made up of children under the age of five (PolicyMap, 2025). Despite this, a majority (57%) of the 281 programs at McDowell Public Library in 2024 were for children, and only 26% of programs were for adults (West Virginia Library Commission, 2024). While gardening provides a number of benefits to children, the primary objectives for the seed library are to help decrease food insecurity and increase fruit and vegetable consumption in McDowell County. To provide more adult programming and improve health outcomes, the seed library is targeted towards adults.

Budget Overview

Most libraries, through the help of external grants, spend around \$5,000 to start a seed library, which covers the cost of seeds and packing materials, printing costs, publicity, and workshops on gardening and seed saving (Peekhaus, 2018). Continuing the seed library could cost up to \$2,500 per year, but that cost could be cut down significantly by encouraging patrons to save and return seeds at the end of the season (Peekhaus, 2018). Below is an estimated start-up cost to open McDowell Public Library's seed library.

Category	Item	Cost Estimate	Explanation
Supplies & Equipment	Seeds	\$2,000	McGill University's Macdonald Campus Library purchased \$4,250 worth of seeds for a student population of about 39,000 (Ingalls, 2019). Considering McDowell Public Library's service population of 19,111 (West Virginia Library Commission, 2024), \$2,000 worth of seeds should be more than enough to start out with.
	Seed Packing Materials	\$250	For purchasing small coin envelopes and printable sticker labels.
Marketing Materials	Social Media Posts, Flyers, Outreach, etc.	\$250	For promoting the seed library and the workshops, which will help reach a broader audience and can justify continuing the initiative in the future.
Collection Development		\$500	McDowell Public Library has 15 adult nonfiction books on vegetable gardening, all but one published before 2000. They don't have any books on seed saving (West Virginia Library Network, n.d.). This money would be used to purchase more recent books on fruit and vegetable gardening and seed saving.
Speaker Expenses/Misc.		\$700	Seed libraries usually offer 6-8 workshops in their first year of operations (Peekhaus, 2018). The library should reserve \$100/session just in case, but Extension Offices and Master Gardeners usually offer their services free of charge. Any leftover money could be redistributed to other categories.
Total Estimated		\$3,700	

Marketing Plan

There are a few common marketing techniques that are used to promote seed libraries.

An inaugural event to celebrate opening the seed library can help build community awareness and participation, as well as attract the attention of the local news (Peekhaus, 2018). This kickoff event held in mid-February will have seeds ready for lending as well as workshops and other gardening-themed activities. Other popular seed library marketing techniques include featuring the seed library in the library's monthly newsletters, posting about the seed library on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, and utilizing community partners to spread information (Peekhaus, 2018). McDowell Public Library should, if possible, utilize all of these marketing techniques to maximize visibility, especially when the seed library is first opening. Of course, word of mouth is one of the most valuable ways to disseminate information and garner interest (Peekhaus, 2018), so more views on initial marketing tactics means greater potential reach as those initial viewers tell their families and friends about the seed library.

Timeline & Time Needed

Milestone	Date	Details
Project Initiation & Planning	Jun 1	Initial meetings to discuss project scope and budget and identify community partners. Planning will begin several months in advance to ensure adequate time for grant applications and other funding sources.
Budget Approval and Fund Dispersal	Nov 1	The budget should be finalized by the beginning of November so funding sources will have adequate time to disperse funds before seeds need to be ordered in late November.
Procurement of Materials	Dec 10	Seed Savers Exchange and other retailers begin offering spring seeds in late November (Peekhaus, 2018), so staff should be prepared to order seeds as soon as they're available to ensure arrival before the seed packing begins.

Marketing and Outreach	Jan 1	Marketing materials such as informational flyers, social media posts, and advertisements in local newspapers will be finalized. Staff members and partner organizations will be tasked with promoting the seed library through their own channels and through outreach events.
Staff Training & Seed Packing	Jan 1	Staff will work together to organize seeds, transfer them into envelopes, label them, and distribute them across the different branches as necessary. In doing so, they will learn what seeds the library will be offering and will learn more about the program itself.
Launch Workshops	Jan 15	Hosting a few workshops before the seed library launches will help garner interest and boost patrons' confidence in their abilities to garden and seed save.
Launch Seed Library	Feb 15	Many seed librarians recommend having the library stocked by the end of February since patrons begin planning their gardens in mid-February (Peekhaus, 2018). The seed library will make its debut with a kickoff event in mid-February, featuring workshops, activities, and more.
Evaluation	Jun 1	Once the seed library slows down at the end of the planting season in May, staff can evaluate the success of the first season using patron feedback forms and counts of how many seed packets have been borrowed.

Preparations for launching the seed library will take at least eight and a half months. The program itself is ongoing, but ebbs and flows with the seasons. The busiest time of year for the seed library will likely be the spring planting season, from around mid-February to the end of May (Peekhaus, 2018). Members of the seed library team will be responsible for planning and organizing the program, finding community partners, and procuring funds. All staff members will be expected to assist with seed packing duties, promoting the seed library through outreach, assisting with workshop and kickoff set-up and clean-up, and answering patron questions. Library leadership will need to oversee the seed library team and approve the budget.

Pertinent Documents

Seed libraries usually offer free informational handouts that provide information on “how to grow particular types of plants, how to grow to make seed saving possible, and how to save seeds from different types of plants” (Peekhaus, 2018). In addition to these handouts, the seed library will also need flyers, program evaluation forms, a label design for the seed packets, and a log for patrons to record what seeds they took. Thankfully, The Seed Library Network provides templates and examples of these documents that can be adapted or utilized as-is (n.d.b).

Potential Partners

Seed libraries are often joint endeavors with a number of different community partners, including Friends of the Library groups, local farmers markets, antihunger organizations, and local health departments (Peekhaus, 2018). The Seed Library Network recommends reaching out to Master Gardeners/Cooperative Extension Offices, horticulture departments, local garden clubs, and more (n.d.a).

West Virginia University has an Extension program in McDowell County that already provides a number of food and nutrition-related programs, including a partnership with nonprofit organization Reconnecting McDowell that created a mobile farmers market. The WVU Extension Office already provides nutrition classes as part of the mobile farmers market initiative (2020), so the Extension Office and Reconnecting McDowell are perfect community partners for McDowell Public Library’s seed library.

Layout

“Strategic placement of the seed collection in the library is key to generating curiosity and interest among patrons coming through the door.” Many libraries repurpose their old card catalogs into seed libraries, which could help “spark enough initial curiosity to induce a number

of patrons into exploring the seed library” (Peekhaus, 2018). If McDowell Public Library still has a card catalog, then the seed library wouldn’t need any additional space. If not, since the community is so small, they could get away with a box or binder atop a service desk or spare table. Two space-efficient examples of seed library setups are shown below in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1

A repurposed gift box seed library from Bedford Seed Library, Bedford, NH.



Note. From Seed Library Network. <https://www.seedlibrarynetwork.org/cabinets.html>

Figure 2

A binder seed library from Portland District Seed Library, Portland, MI.



Note. From Seed Library Network. <https://www.seedlibrarynetwork.org/cabinets.html>

For the workshops, a programming area or room with space for up to 15 patrons is needed.

Depending on the presenter, a projector or tv may be required to show a Powerpoint presentation.

Program Evaluation

To evaluate the success of the seed library, staff will track how many seed packets are taken and which types are most popular. They will monitor the attendance of the workshops and the circulation data of the new books. Before each workshop, patrons will be asked their confidence level with gardening and seed saving. After each workshop, patrons will be asked to fill out an evaluation form that asks them questions including what they liked and didn't like about the program, what could be improved, what's their most valuable takeaway, and again how confident they are in their knowledge about gardening and seed saving after having taken the workshop.

Patrons who take seeds from the seed library will be asked to fill out a log with their name, email, and what seeds they're taking. After the season is over, staff can use those emails to

contact patrons to ask them a few questions about whether they started a garden, how the experience was, how it affected their fruit and vegetable intake, how it affected their grocery bill, will they be using the seed library again, and any feedback they have.

Conclusion

Establishing a seed library at McDowell Public Library would be a meaningful way for the library to help address McDowell County's challenges with food insecurity and limited access to fresh produce. By offering free seeds, workshops, and other educational resources, the library can empower its patrons to grow their own fruits and vegetables, improving both nutrition and self-sufficiency. In a low income, rural area with few community resources and limited access, this program represents more than a gardening initiative. It reflects the library's mission to promote access, equity, and public good to its community. Through this initiative, the library can serve as a community hub for learning, connection, and empowerment in McDowell County.

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