

**GARDENING
THE COMMUNITY**



Funding Youth Engagement in Urban Gardening

**A grant proposal for
\$15,000 to fund a
youth outreach team
for Gardening the
Community in
Springfield, MA**

**SUBMITTED TO THE FOOD AND FARM
COMMUNICATIONS FUND**

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DECEMBER 19, 2018



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December 19, 2018

Hilde Steffey
Food and Farm Communications Fund
Greater Kansas City Community Foundation
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Dear Ms. Steffey,

On behalf of Gardening the Community (GTC) in Springfield, Massachusetts, I am writing to you to respectfully request a grant in the amount of \$15,000 from the Food and Farms Communication Fund for the implementation and first school year of operation of the GTC Youth for Urban Gardening Outreach Program.

In Springfield, Massachusetts, food insecurity impacts a large number of people that are either low-income or live in low-income communities. The primary reason for this is due to the proven prevalence of food deserts in these areas, meaning that low-income areas are often deprived of grocery stores and markets with healthy food alternatives due to an assumption that they are unable to afford this kind of produce or healthy lifestyle. For children in particular, this phenomenon can be exceptionally dangerous, leading to high rates of childhood obesity and risks of chronic diseases. The goal of Gardening the Community is to promote healthy and sustainable diets within low-income areas, starting with Springfield, MA. Through locally-grown farming and youth involvement, GTC is combatting food insecurity through catering to and engaging the entire community of Springfield through urban gardening and sustainability.

In order to progress the fight against food injustice Gardening the Community, I am seeking funding to organize a GTC street team that will function as a youth outreach program across public schools in Springfield. We hope to expand the resources and sustainable living practices that GTC offers to more people in need throughout the city, and reach youth in the low-income areas in hopes of encouraging sustainable practices at a young age. We understand that the Food and Farms Communication Fund is not able to support an organization's ongoing communications activities, so we hope that you see the long-term potential of this proposal to contribute to the causes of food justice and sustainability in our local community. Thank you for your consideration and feel free to contact me with any further questions.

Sincerely,
Sabrina Taylor

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Summary of Grant Proposal

Intention

Based on their emphasis in youth involvement and community building through the organization, the purpose of this grant proposal is to seek funding for Gardening the Community to organize a public-school street team that will serve as outreach and encourage youth in Springfield, Massachusetts to get involved in the organization. This street team would visit each public school in the city over the course of an entire school year, which would be approximately 10 months. During this time, the team would host a presentation and interactive session with those students who attend the presentation in their classes, educating these students on food justice and getting them involved in small-scale sustainable practices.

Outline of Proposal

In this proposal, I will begin by contextualizing the conditions of the proposal and the organization that I have chosen to work with, beginning with a history of Gardening the Community and the statement of need that helps bring to light the issues surrounding food insecurity that make this proposal necessary in the first place. Following this, I will discuss potential steps taken towards confronting the issue of food insecurity, and ultimately, the method that this proposal focuses on seeking funding for in particular. I will then discuss the goals and objectives that have been set for this plan, the breakdown of the budget that is being requested for the proposal, and the methods and schedule that is projected for the completion of our project. Finally, I will address the feasibility of this plan as a whole, discussing that other funding is being provided to the organization and evaluating the logistics of the plan overall.

Purpose/Goal

Ultimately, the long-term goal for this project is to help combat food insecurity and the trend of food deserts in the US, beginning on a small-scale level with Springfield, Massachusetts. Food injustice is an issue across many states and cities throughout the US and globally, but by organizing projects and programs such as the GTC Youth for Urban Gardening Outreach Program that is proposed through this project, this problem can be confronted from the ground up and worked at locally in order to be expanded on in a more wide-scale level in the near future. This project promises to provide healthier food alternatives to low-income communities that are not normally prioritized in strides towards sustainability and healthy food practices.



History of Organization

Gardening the Community (GTC) is a food justice non-profit organization that focuses their work towards youth engagement, urban farming and sustainability in Springfield, Massachusetts in order to build healthy and equitable communities. Founded in 2002 by Massachusetts Northeast Organic Farming Association members Betsy Corner and Springfield Ruby Maddox (Roman), this organization was established with the intention of encouraging youth in Springfield to become involved in urban farming and sustainability. Not only does this organization produce locally-grown food for the communities in Springfield, but this produce is then available throughout the city, in locations ranging from the Mason Square Farmers Market, local restaurants, and corner stores.

Much of the work that this organization does is fueled by youth involvement, through which they provide stipends, internships, and real work experience in urban agriculture practices through providing them with positions in the organization. Along with this, these youth workers are also able to bring food home to their families. In order to maintain a sustainable lifestyle and encourage healthy lifestyle choices in the community, all of their farm produce is delivered using bikes and heavy-duty bike trailers. No pesticides or herbicides of any kind are used in the food that is grown on GTC farms, and all work is done without the use of any major farm equipment. In order to irrigate crops, GTC harvests



Volunteers for Gardening the Community. Image by GTC WordPress.

water through rain collection and other water conservation methods, reducing their dependence on the city water supply and implementing low-input farming practices. Because a large part of the goal of this organization is to make healthy eating habits and sustainability more accessible in low-income areas such as those within Springfield, the organization also offers subsidized shares for members in their Farm Share Program in order to help them afford to participate. This kind of effort is especially beneficial to those residents of Springfield who struggle with food insecurity regularly, as a large part of the problem with food injustice and food deserts is the inaccessibility and far-distances of markets that offer healthy food. Through GTC's Farm Share Program, farm fresh vegetables are delivered to members' nearby homes.

Statement of Need

Food insecurity is an issue that impacts communities both across the US and globally, but serves as a greater threat in some urban areas such as Springfield, Massachusetts. Food insecurity takes shape in a number of ways, one of the most prominent being through the existence of food deserts. A food desert can be defined as an urban area that has little to no access to affordable and/or healthy food in close proximity. These areas that lack grocery stores and healthy food alternatives for residents also go hand in hand with corner stores and fast food chains that are put in their place. In low-income areas, food deserts have proven to be the most prominent as a result of the assumption that these communities cannot afford healthy produce. As a result of this trend in assumption, the same areas which are food deserts are also those which are most heavily populated with fast food chains and corner stores that only provide cheap and unhealthy food alternatives. For Springfield, MA in particular, there are many neighborhoods that fall under low-income and ultimately face the systemic issue of food deserts on a regular basis. In an article for the Boston Globe on food deserts in Massachusetts, Felice Freyer points out that “It’s not hard to find a McDonald’s in the Mason Square section of Springfield. Liz O’Gilvie has counted 10 within a mile and three-quarters of her home. But the nearest full-service grocery store, with plump apples and curly kale? That’s 2 miles away, and going that

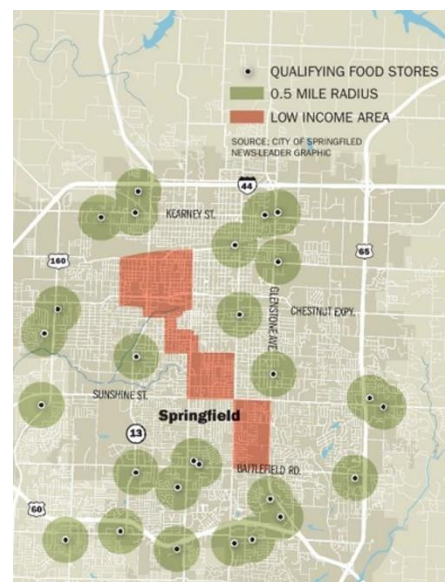


Figure 2. Map of food stores located in Springfield within or outside the range of low-income areas. Image by News-Leader.

distance on public transit requires a two-hour trek on three buses.” (Freyer)

Although food insecurity impacts many residents within Springfield across age, class, race, and gender, children are most dangerously impacted by the trend of food deserts in the area. This is primarily due to the systemic placement of food deserts and their location often being in areas of low-income. Alongside impacting low-income neighborhoods, families within these residential areas are faced with the costs of both childcare and food security, often having to compromise one for the other. According to a 2016 Project Bread Status Report on hunger in Massachusetts, it was reported that “food insecurity is not going down due in part to the rising cost of living, including housing and child care. Massachusetts is currently ranked at having the second highest child care costs in the country” (ProjectBread.org). Because of these conditions for child care in the state, alongside other living conditions in Massachusetts, food insecurity most deeply affects families and households with children in low-income areas. As a result, children become one of the most vulnerable groups in within food deserts. As youth are developing, it is important that they are consuming healthy foods that will nourish and fill them adequately, rather than eating fast food on a regular basis that may lead to dangerous health problems for these children in the future. Through the Springfield Food Policy Council, it had been reported that “Close to 60% of Springfield's K-12 Students are overweight or obese, and many are rapidly heading towards a lifetime of chronic disease such as diabetes and heart disease. State health data shows the rate of diabetes mortality is higher in Springfield (52.3 per 100,000) compared to all of Massachusetts (35.3/100,000)” (SpringfieldFoodPolicyCouncil.org).

While food insecurity has been an ongoing issue for a long time now, it can be difficult to approach this issue in an effective and small-scale way in order to impact a community

immediately. In order to come up with the best possible solution to combat food insecurity in Springfield in particular, it was important to consider the most wide-spread issues surrounding food insecurity that were specific to the area. Along with this, I had to then keep in mind what methods would be the most feasible and effective both as a short-term project and with a long-term impact.

With the establishment of organizations such as Gardening the Community already in place, I considered using this proposal to fund equipment for GTC to expand their current projects and be able to develop more urban gardens throughout parts of Springfield that were still sparse or had unattainable access to the resources that they provided for the community. By putting funding towards equipment to improve this organization that has already proven successful thus far, the grant would allow for the development of urban gardens in those areas that are still face high insecurity with adequate food supply and healthy food alternatives. However, this kind of project would be something that would need to be funded continuously in order to be maintained, and it the kind of maintenance and equipment that would be necessary for just the first year of production could easily exceed the average budget funding of \$25,000 from the Food and Farm Communications Fund.

Transportation is one of the biggest issues that people face when struggling to find adequate and affordable produce in their local communities. Food deserts exist as a result of limited access to grocery stores and healthy food in close proximity of a city or neighborhood, and without the proper transportation to reach locations that grocery stores are located, these people are left to struggle with food insecurity. As noted by an article on food deserts in the Springfield News-Leader, “Springfield is a town where, if you have a car, you can get to where

you're going.' However, for those who don't have access to a car, food — especially fresh, healthy food — can be very difficult to get their hands on.” (Herzog). While I had considered dedicating this proposal to finding an effective means of transportation for accessing grocery stores throughout Springfield, this would require some kind of on-going funding for gas, potential vehicle repairs, and compensation for workers' in charge of the vehicle and project that may not prove effective in the long-run.

Because of the systemic injustice that food insecurity is rooted in, the method that has been chosen for this proposal is to develop a street team that will educate the Springfield community on resources for alternatives to food security that may not be provided to them otherwise. In this case, this would mean educating the community on sustainability, urban gardening, and food justice. Sustainability is often a topic reserved for more privileged communities that can afford to easily live healthy lifestyles, but this is dangerous to limit to high-income communities as they are not the ones who need it most. It is important to educate low-income neighborhoods on sustainable practices and urban gardening in an effort to encourage them to get involved in these practices in any way that they can locally, and it would be most effective to do so by engaging the youth as a priority. Not only are many residents that face food insecurity living under low-wages, but they do not have the time to get involved in work alongside their full-time jobs such as with urban gardening. At the same time, many youth in middle and high school seek work experience and extracurriculars that will help them build real-world skills for future careers. Not only are youth opportunities through GTC given stipends, but they also allow students to get the volunteer work that they often seek during their time leading up to college and career searches.

Goals and Objectives

By educating and engaging in outreach with the Springfield youth, the goal is to bring in more youth volunteers and employees to work with Gardening the Community and help normalize sustainable practices across Springfield, beginning with implementing these practices in public schools. Over the course of one school year, our proposed team will travel to each public school in Springfield and work with classes to engage in discussion on food justice, sustainability, and urban gardening. For younger audiences such as elementary schools and middle schools, this may mean preparing a presentation on compost and planning group activities that show where compost goes and how to garden using it. For high schools, this may mean organizing productive conversations around their own observations of food injustice in their community and ways to go about actively challenging food deserts and food insecurity in their neighborhoods locally. Across many schools, we hope to develop urban gardens in any space available and permitted on the school grounds, from basketball courts to indoor gardens with window boxes, with garden facilitators at each school that will help to ensure the steady maintenance of these gardens following GTC's visit and assistance.

Ultimately, this method of outreach and education is being proposed with the intention of bringing awareness to healthy and sustainable alternatives among the youth that will encourage them to become involved in organizations such as GTC and urban gardening practices across Springfield. With this, the long-term goal is that youth involvement in sustainability will become more prominent and that urban gardens established in these public schools will expand and help feed many of the students and their families within these communities. Along with this,

organizing a street team for Gardening the Community will help to shed light on the resources that this organization provides for people across the city of Springfield and the issues surrounding food insecurity as a whole. As previously mentioned, sustainability is a topic of conversation that is often reserved for people of privilege or people in high-income communities, who can afford regularly buying healthy and locally-grown produce in farmers markets and high-end grocery stores. However, the purpose behind organizing around collectives such as GTC is to show how this conversation of sustainability and health food alternatives is not only accessible to every, but how it is very necessary for those communities that are not given the same opportunities for a healthy and organic lifestyle.

Project Budget

In order to put together a street team that will be traveling over the course of an entire school year, or approximately 10 months, and both presenting and hosting interactive projects at each of the schools, it is important to consider many factors that will play into the budget that is being requested for this grant proposal. Factors such as transportation, gardening equipment for those school gardens that will be constructed, presentation equipment, developing land, and allowance for any natural increase in salaries and fuel prices for the works will have to be considered when organizing this outreach team.

Expense	Projected Cost
Personnel	\$12,500
Cost of Fuel	\$350
Presentation Equipment/ Activity Materials	\$550
Tools for Land Development	\$550
First-Time Compost Installation from Collins Compost (local to Springfield)	\$1,200
Allowance for Natural Increase in Salaries and Fuel Prices	\$350

In regards to transportation, assuming the cost of gas is \$3/gallon, the fuel efficiency of the car is an average of 20 miles/gallon, and that the street team would be traveling across most of Springfield and back, which would be approximately 2,204 miles in total, the desired budget for the cost of gas throughout this trip is around \$350 of the total requested amount for funding.

The organization already has vehicles that have helped to transport equipment across Springfield in the past, so costs for a vehicle would not have to be taken into consideration. For compensation for workers, assuming the organization will send 3 people each time, each travel is more or less 6 hours (taking into consideration some longer travels or set ups for those schools that will be creating gardens), keeping in mind that we will be traveling to 57 public schools across Springfield (the equivalent of 57 days), and that the minimum wage in Massachusetts is \$12/hour, the projected cost for personnel amounts to approximately \$12,300.

Although the plan is to start school gardens in as many of the public schools as possible, it has been taken into consideration that some schools may already have some kind of garden system, such as Brightwood Elementary School and Springfield Public Day Elementary, this proposal would seek funding for the creation of school gardens in only half of the schools that we travel to. This is due to both the establishment of gardens already in place at many of these schools, as well as the assumption that some schools may not have the proper land development to create a “full-sized” (100 sq.ft.) garden or may not permit the creation of a garden on their school grounds. Because there are 57 public schools in Springfield, the goal would be for GTC to create school gardens in at least 29 of these schools. For these gardens, costs would go towards tools for land development and first-time compost installation. Aside from this, other costs for each school will be put towards presentation equipment and interactive projects with each of the schools. In total, the budget needed for this project would come out to approximately \$15,000.

Methods, Strategies, and Program Design

Distributing the work load over the course of an entire school year, this project is intended to be completed over the course of approximately 10 months. Each month beginning in September and ending in May, the street team that is hired to complete this outreach project will present at an average of 6 schools per month, and set up at least 3 school gardens per month alongside this. The school garden set-ups may require more time than expected, or may be delayed depending on weather conditions, but will be expected to be completed within the week of visiting the school (as they will be anywhere from 100 square feet to even simpler small garden spaces that will not require demanding set-up or land development). For each presentation, one worker will be in charge of presenting the PowerPoint that will be set up, and the other two workers will be responsible for the activity that will follow the presentation. The powerpoint presentation structure will be the same for each school: beginning with an introduction to what Gardening the Community is and what the organization does, introducing the concept of sustainability and what makes environmental and food conditions “sustainable” (i.e. discussing compost, water harvesting, locally-grown produce, etc.), and talking about the importance of urban gardening and healthy food alternatives and how students can get involved with or practice these lifestyles. There will be three different PowerPoint presentations created for each school level, ranging from elementary to middle to high school; this will help to determine the focus of topics and the ways in which the team executes the presentation in order to reach the audience by their age range.

Following the presentations, there will be activities for each of the classes that attend the presentation. Similar to the set-up for the PowerPoint, these activities will be dependent on the age-range and what school the team is attending. The activities will vary from arts and crafts using recycled products, making a “compost bottle” that helps to demonstrate the process of compostable material being broken down in soil, making a worm farm (as worms help to break down leftover food and turn them into natural fertilizer), and helping to set-up and plan the school gardens.

For those schools that are permitted to create a garden on the school grounds, the process will begin immediately following the presentation by the GTC street team. First, the team will convene with the students and begin to plan the layout of the garden- what in-season fruits and vegetables the students want in the garden, what the students will want to do with the grown product (e.g. use in school lunches, distribute to students, sell in fundraisers for the school, etc.), and from then on, begin planting those seeds that will go into the garden to be inserted after the development of the land on the school grounds in the following weeks.

After meeting with the students and engaging in discussions with them during the activities and garden-planning, the street team will leave students with a reflection sheet or personal project that will encourage them to reflect on their sustainable practices and relationship to sustainability and food justice on a daily basis, whether it is something as simple as providing a worksheet on where their food goes after it is thrown away to external resources for food insecure students that are in need of more help for healthy food alternatives. Ultimately, the goal is that students will be left thinking about how they can get involved with

urban gardening, sustainability, and food justice in their own time even after GTC comes to present at their school

The tentative schedule for this project is as follows:

Projected Date for Completion	Task
Mid/Late August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather necessary equipment/materials
Late August/Early September (Beginning of School Year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at 6 schools • Set up minimum of 3 gardens
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at 6 schools • Set up minimum of 3 gardens
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at 6 schools • Set up minimum of 3 gardens
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at 6 schools • Set up minimum of 3 gardens
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at 6 schools • Set up minimum of 3 gardens • Evaluate progress • Check in with schools already visited at end of month
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at 6 schools • Set up minimum of 3 gardens
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at 6 schools • Set up minimum of 3 gardens
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at 6 schools • Set up minimum of 3 gardens
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present at 6 schools • Set up minimum of 3 gardens
Early June (End of School Year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with all schools visited • Present at 6 schools • Evaluate progress

Sustainability of Project

Although much of the success and completion of this kind of project is dependent on our request for the budget from the Food and Farm Communications Fund grant, the sustainability of this project as a long-term achievement is very feasible due to the other external factors and supporters that help to make Gardening the Community function in the first place. While this is a project with a limited timeline, a schedule of approximately 10 months, the maintenance and re-visiting of the school gardens can be made possible by funding from other sources and GTC's individual success thus far. GTC is partnered with a number of schools, businesses, and organizations, including but not limited to:

- University of Massachusetts Amherst
- Whole Foods Market
- LiveWell Springfield
- CISA (Community Involved in Sustainable Agriculture)
- Bay Path University
- Springfield College
- Westfield State University

Through such partnerships with large collectives, alongside the many donors that frequently give to Gardening the Community, this project is not only feasible for its scheduled timeline, but also able to be continued in the future following the completion of the project.

Evaluation

Through the development of this grant proposal, alongside the amount of research conducted on sustainable practices and conditions local to Springfield surrounding food injustice, sustainability, and the public-school system, I am confident in the ability for this kind of project to be successful in its overall goals and objectives. Not only will this project's success be evaluated following its completion at the end of the school year, but there will be an ongoing assessment in between months after visits to each of the public schools as well. This will help better evaluate what is working with the project, what is not, and what may need changing along the way in order to achieve the best results in the long-run. The team at Gardening the Community will keep record of the success by keeping in close contact with faculty at the schools, and for those schools which had gardens set up, communicating with them frequently to see how well maintained the gardens are by students and the designated garden facilitator. Along with this, GTC will distribute evaluation sheets to the classes that will function as surveys asking students to reflect on how much they enjoyed and gained from GTC's visit, what they learned, and how they think what they learned affects them personally. If enough students are able to state that they gained anything from GTC's visit and can understand how the lessons from the presentation impact them personally, then the organization will consider the project successful in its goals and overall objectives.

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