

## Grant Writing Tips



The following is a list of suggestions compiled by FoodCorps Fellows who contributed to our 2013 review process.

In no way are you required to follow these suggestions, but feel free to utilize them as a resource when working on your application.

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When writing a grant, we'd recommend incorporating the following:

1. **BE SPECIFIC**
2. **BE UNIQUE**
3. **BE CONCISE**
4. **BE REALISTIC**
5. **BE STRATEGIC**
6. **BE SUSTAINABLE**
7. **BE PASSIONATE**

### **BE SPECIFIC**

#### **When Discussing your Budget:**

Be specific about money (after all, you are asking for money). How are you going to use the money and for what, *exactly*?

**Poor example:** "The funds will be used to purchase supplies and supplement labor for our garden program"

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**Better:** “The funds will be used to buy potting soil, fertilizer, pots, labels, etc for the greenhouse; sprinklers, hoses, and lumber for garden beds in the garden; and cooking ingredients, utensils, and plates for the kitchen. The remainder will be used towards staff expenses (no more than 1/4 of the grant funds).”

**Even Better:** an itemized list:

### GARDEN VERMICOMPOSTING PROJECT ESTIMATED BUDGET

Four 4' x 8' worm bins- Approx. \$500.00  
One cedar vermicompost holding bin- Approx. \$120.00  
100 pounds of Eisenia fetida (red worms)- Approx. \$875.00  
Soil tiller - Approx. \$200.00  
Garden tools- Approx \$115.00  
Hanging Scale- approx \$90.00  
Wheelbarrow- approx- \$100.00  
TOTAL: APPROX. \$2,000.00

*\*this is especially important if your grant project is nested within a larger project for which you are outlining overall costs and revenues. Make sure it is clear how this \$2000 (or whatever the request is for) fits into that larger budget specifically*

**Pick a specific project** to focus on. It is much more attractive (from a reviewer standpoint) to have funds go to a specific part of a project (as in the example above, for a Vermicomposting system that supports the overall garden program/vision) than for funds to be requested for a few things here, and a few things there in a scattered, disconnected manner. Bigger projects are not necessarily better. It's better to have a very clear, well-organized project proposal that will engage 60 students than a broad, vague one that intends to engage 500.

### In How You Evaluate your Program:

Not only does this give the reviewer a clear picture of how the funds will support the growth of your program, but it also displays that you have a clear view of your garden program and how it will interact with your students.

When answering this question, here are some ideas to jog your thoughts:

- ❖ How long has the program been around?
- ❖ How many meals have come out of your garden?
- ❖ How many pounds of produce been donated? How much time do kids actually spend in the garden? (if you have a FoodCorps service member, your fellow can often help you generate these numbers from America Learns)
- ❖ Do you collect any information from the students in your program about their reactions to gardening and cooking/trying healthy foods? Information could range from simple, such as

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class polls or votes conducted in response to taste tests, or more in-depth, such as pre- and post surveys of garden programs.

### **Poor Example:**

“Our garden coordinator \_\_\_\_\_ spends much of her time working with children throughout the school.”

### **Better:**

“Each class comes to the Farm for forty-five minutes two times per month”

### **Even Better:**

“Our garden hosts 50 students each week in 45 minutes classes with 2 instructors at each class. This is 3 hours in the garden per student. Produce from the garden is used in a meal in the cafeteria once a month. This is 9 meals a year. We hope to improve our garden program by increasing our student participation to 100 students twice a week, instead of once a week. This would increase student participation to 6 hours a month. We hope to use garden produce in 2 cafeteria meals a month, increasing garden meals to 18 meals a year.”

## **In How You Communicate Your Needs:**

Use this opportunity to express challenges faced by your particular school/community. Applications are stronger when the grant reviewer understands the specific/unique needs of your community that can be addressed through a grant.

**Remember:** need is not limited to economics. It can also include:

- ❖ Health disparities: physical and mental
- ❖ Access to resources
- ❖ Location restrictions
- ❖ District or administration barriers
- ❖ Community history.

Here are some ideas for how to find more specific resources. You are in no way required to use these ideas:

- Communicate with your local public health offices and organizations to learn more about the challenges and needs relating to the health of children and adolescents in your area, and describe how your garden program can help meet those needs.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also maintains statistics about the health of youth in America, often broken down to the state level. You can find more information on [their website](#).
- The County Health Rankings and Roadmaps [website](#) also has public health information broken down by county.
- Think locally as well. What do the children at your school need, and how does your program serve that? Think about your free and reduced lunch rate, the number and types of nurse

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visits, the breakdown of disciplinary issues at your school, the challenges your student tend to face at home - how does your school garden fit into the larger picture of your school community?

### **In How You Integrate into the Curriculum:**

School Gardens are an opportunity to teach students about where their food comes from in a variety of angles. The more the garden can be incorporated into all of their classes and their school community, the more the message will be driven home to them. Tell us about how you will accomplish this and be specific as possible!

#### **Poor example:**

“Our Garden will be integrated into Science and Math class.”

#### **Better:**

“Our Garden will be integrated into Science class as we teach about plant cycles, photosynthesis, ecosystems and environmental sustainability. It will be integrated into Math class with lessons on area, volume, planning and adding/subtracting. “

#### **Even better:**

“Our Garden will be integrated into Science class for each grade. 1<sup>st</sup> grade will learn how different plants grow and which parts we eat for each vegetable. 2<sup>nd</sup> grade will learn about seed sprouting. 3<sup>rd</sup> grade will learn about ecosystems. 4<sup>th</sup> grade will learn about photosynthesis. 5<sup>th</sup> grade will learn about environmental sustainability and the scientific method. As weather permits, teachers will teach all of these units in the garden to create hands on learning.

It will be integrated into Math class in a variety of ways. 5<sup>th</sup> grade will complete the math needed to build a new garden bed. They will build a new bed each year. 4<sup>th</sup> grade will do the planning for our square foot gardens, determining how many plants can go in each bed and where to place them. 3<sup>rd</sup> grade will learn about area, perimeter, and volume by studying the garden beds. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade will teach Math in the garden whenever appropriate to bring counting, adding and subtracting to life. “

## **BE UNIQUE**

If you are writing one template proposal for a number of different sites, make sure you tailor each one in some way. One reviewer could read all of them and may deduct points. Relatedly, if the original template proposal isn't stellar, all of the submissions may get the same low grade. Increase your chances of getting one of your applications awarded by making a strong, individual case with each request.

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In addition, if you are just submitting one application, make it stand out! All garden projects are special, but how is yours a shining example of a sustainable program that will be incorporated into the school's culture and curriculum?

### Add examples

#### **BE CONCISE**

Keep most of your wording succinct and to the point. Use bullet points! A grant reviewer, no matter how brilliant, only has so much space in the brain (especially after reviewing a number of grants in succession). Don't clutter their ability to see your project clearly by providing extraneous information. There is a fine line between unnecessary language and making a point or saying something unique about your program with strong imagery.

##### **Poor Example:**

"We do have tools to garden, but we desperately need a safe place to store them. With the grant we can do that! Please help us have more time in the garden!"

##### **Better:**

"This grant will make it possible for city kids, many of which are low-income, to touch worms, smell lemon verbena, taste egg flower soup, hear cows moo, and see the beauty of real life on a farm in their own community."

##### **Even Better:**

"This grant will make it possible for **100** city kids, many of which are low-income, to explore all of their sense in the gardens. From touching worms to smelling lemon verbena to tasting egg flower soup. There will be 14 classes throughout the year, which will cover the following topics:

- Seed starting
- Planning a garden
- Planting
- Harvesting
- Composting"

#### **BE REALISTIC**

Be realistic about the garden project you are planning: have clear objectives your school community can achieve. Big is great, but its not ***always*** better. Outline how each phase of the process will be conducted. If you have specific and/or unique challenges facing your project, talk about them and the ways you will overcome them. Show that you have really thought through your project and all the possible hurdles you may have to jump over, and then be specific about how you will address each.

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### **Poor:**

“Last summer we had a hard time getting volunteers to water the garden, but we’re hopeful that this year we’ll recruit more people to help.”

### **Better:**

“We learned a lot last summer when the volunteers we recruited couldn’t keep up with the needs of the garden. At the end of the season we developed a task force that researched and presented alternatives. This spring we will work on outreach to parents, partner organizations, and teachers living in the neighborhood through newsletters, social media and PAC meetings to recruit volunteers.”

## **BE STRATEGIC**

Pay attention to the grant’s purpose. In other words, know your audience. For example, as an organization, Whole Kids Foundation’s focus is to improve children’s health and wellness through nutrition. Don’t hesitate to answer how your school garden will accomplish this and highlight any edible aspects. If the grant focuses on environmental literacy, answer to this. If your program does not satisfy the mission of the organization or the grant, consider other grants. Stick to your program’s possibilities and strengths.

## **BE SUSTAINABLE**

Grantors do not seek to be your one source of funding and look for assurance that their investment will not go to waste once the funds have been used. Seek other sources of funding AND support. This includes in kind donations of materials, or simply expertise and just awareness. Then communicate them! Don’t be shy. List all of the ways you have received and will receive support. Even if you haven’t received other support yet, come up for a plan for how you **hope** to receive support.

### **Poor:**

Whole Kids Foundation is the only grant we plan to apply for. We have the support of our PTA.

### **Better:**

We have received materials from our local Home depot and gardening store.

### **Even Better:**

We have received materials from our local Home Depot and gardening store. We applied for a Home Depot school garden grant but did not get it. We plan to reapply this year and to the Annie’s gardening grant. We are also ramping up our garden events as a way to garner awareness of our school garden and possibly generate more funds.

## **BE PASSIONATE!**

## **Grant Writing Tips**

It helps to show passion for your project, throughout your application and especially in the overall goals section.

### **Examples**