



# Community Garden Sustainability Fund Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Updated June 2024

## OVERVIEW

### 1. What is the Community Garden Sustainability Fund (CGSF)?

The CGSF is a project of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and Grow Pittsburgh that provides support to established community food gardens in Allegheny County. CGSF has been active since 2013, having supported 165+ community gardens with over \$350,000 of materials, not including staff time.

### 2. Who is eligible to receive support?

Any established community-focused food garden group in Allegheny County is encouraged to apply. This includes gardens managed by volunteer teams, schools, community organizations, shelters, and religious institutions. “Established” means you currently grow food and/or host programming at the garden related to food-growing. This fund does not provide start-up support for new projects. Gardens currently enrolled in Grow Pittsburgh’s community garden or school garden programs are not eligible to apply.

### 3. What does CGSF support entail?

We provide both material and technical support. This means that garden groups plan projects and request supplies from us, and we coordinate and/ or deliver the supplies. We also consult and collaborate with garden groups on their projects.

We refer to CGSF as an “in-kind mini-grant.” An “in-kind” grant comes in the form of time, services, and/ or physical items instead of money.

### 4. What’s the maximum amount of support I can apply for?

First, try to just request what you need instead of going for the maximum. We begin each round with a fixed budget, and we divide our budget up as equitably as possible between all the gardens who apply.



The majority of applications awarded have budgets under \$1000. Rarely, we will fund larger projects with budgets up to \$2000, and very rarely up to \$5000. We require additional information from applications with budgets over \$1000.

5. Do I need to have 501(c)3 tax-exempt status?

No.

6. Are there any other requirements?

Unless you are a school garden on school property, the application requires written permission from the landowner (public or private) proving gardening activities are allowed on the site. If your garden is on City of Pittsburgh property, you need permission via the City's Adopt-A-Lot Program. All project requests must comply with [Adopt-A-Lot requirements](#).

7. Can I edit my application once I've started it?

Yes. The online application will save your progress and prompt you to enter your email address. You will be sent a link immediately so you can open the application where you left off at a later time. This link can be opened on any computer. Once the application has been submitted, it will no longer be editable. Although this feature is available on the application, we cannot guarantee that your device and browser setup will be compatible with the "save and continue later" feature. Please test it out early in your application, or record your work on another document as you go.

8. What do you mean by Sustainability?

The Community Garden **Sustainability** Fund is meant to **sustain** community gardens, so that they can be tended and enjoyed for many years. A sustainable garden is one made to last, where little is wasted and plants are healthy. A sustainable garden has access to sufficient materials, volunteers, and funds. Its leadership and membership include a diversity of energized and creative people. CGSF provides support to keep gardens going with the day-to-day of their garden's operations, and to help bolster them for a vibrant and resilient future.

## SUPPLIES AND BUDGETS

9. What types of support DON'T you provide?

- Startup costs for new gardens
- Cash
- Stipends or wages
- Chainsaws or other more dangerous tools
- Fees for insurance or taxes
- Payment for utility bills like electricity or water

10. What are some examples of frequently requested supplies/ projects?

- Books
- Compost or soil
- Compost bins
- Hand tools
- A one-year membership to Grow Pittsburgh's [Garden Resource Center](#)
- Perennial edible fruits and herbs
- Power tools such as small tillers, lawn mowers (some restrictions apply)
- Rain barrels
- Season extension (row cover, low tunnels, high tunnel/ greenhouse parts)
- Seed starting materials (potting soil, pots, trays)
- Seedlings or seeds
- Soil amendments or soil testing
- Straw or other mulch material
- Fencing (typically upgrades or repairs to existing systems)
- Irrigation systems
- Raised beds (lumber, hardware, kits)
- Tool storage (tool bins or sheds)
- Consultation on an infrastructure build plan or repair plan
- Consultation on farming or gardening techniques
- Consultation on community outreach and organizing techniques
- Consultation on garden team building and leader roles
- Consultation on conflict management and garden transitions
- Workshops for garden groups on a wide variety of topics

## 11. How do I budget for my project?

- Budget tips for soil and compost
  - One cubic yard of compost or topsoil costs about \$50 from our preferred supplier (Agrecycle). If you have a different preferred supplier, please call them to ask about their pricing.
  - Remember to include the cost of delivery. Delivery costs average about \$100 with Agrecycle.
  - An online soil calculator will help you figure out how many cubic yards you need. Try [this one](#).
  
- Budgeting for raised beds
  - One raised bed kit made of high quality, local untreated lumber costs about \$300.
  - One good quality, corrugated metal raised bed kit could cost \$120 before shipping. Making a raised bed out of a heavy duty metal feed trough might cost about \$300.
  
- Budgeting for seedlings
  - Seedling costs vary between greenhouses. We're glad to make a purchase through your preferred or local nursery, so just check their pricing if you're requesting their seedlings.
  - We frequently provide seedling vouchers for community gardens to shop at our Garden Dreams nursery.
  - At Garden Dreams, a single seedling in a 3" pot costs \$3.55. We also have 4-packs of many crops that sell for \$5. This means you can get a minimum of 10 plants for \$35.50, a minimum of 50 plants for \$177.50, and a minimum of 100 plants for \$355.
  
- Budgeting for straw
  - One locally farmed, minimally treated straw bale costs \$7.
  
- Budgeting for tools
  - Every True Value Hardware is our favorite local source for tools and hardware. Visit the [True Value website](#) and use the search bar in the upper right hand corner to find the item you want and its cost.
  - Home Depot and Lowe's are completely fine sources as well.



## APPLICATION LOGISTICS AND “WHAT-IFS”

12. What are the due dates for applications?

- Spring round: March 15th
- Late summer/ fall round: August 1st

13. When will I know if my project has been accepted? If accepted, how long will I wait to receive the items I requested?

We will let you know within about 4 weeks after that cycle’s due date whether your application has been awarded. Projects will be completed within about 8 weeks.

We do our best to complete time-sensitive projects first.

14. What if my project idea isn’t listed?

Please give us as much information as you can on the application. If you have any questions, it’s best to get in touch as early as possible in the application process. Lack of clarity or details about your garden’s request may result in your application being declined.

15. What do I do if I’m eligible, but my CGSF application is not approved?

If your project is not approved, we may give you feedback about how to scale down the project into smaller projects over time. We can give you feedback to help you apply next time. We also have information about other grants that you might want to apply to. Please inquire if you’d like additional information.

16. What do I do if my garden needs more support than the CGSF mini-grant can provide?

There are many local and non-local grants that community gardens can apply for if you’re planning a major project or seeking a straight monetary grant. See our



[Funding Resources](#) list for ideas, and [subscribe to our Community Garden Network newsletter](#) to be notified when we learn of new opportunities.

Grow Pittsburgh does larger and extended project support with gardens through our New Garden Program and Highly Supported Garden Program. Reach out to [Dora Walmsley](#), our Director of Community Projects, for more information.

17. Can I apply to the Community Garden Sustainability Fund more than once?

Yes. You can apply to both rounds each calendar year. You can also apply multiple years in a row.

18. How do you prioritize applications?

Applicants that submit complete applications on time and who are eligible to receive support through the CGSF will be considered.

Priority will go to those applicants which:

- a) explain clearly what they need and why
- b) explain how the project will directly improve the long-term success of the garden and community impact
- c) contain requests for supplies that are highly essential to gardening
- d) are applying to the fund for the first time, or for the first time this year
- e) are graduates of the New Garden program
- f) are in communities of color or low resourced communities
- g) are in food apartheid communities or communities that face challenges related to environmental justice

19. How do I submit the best possible application?

Great question!

- First make sure to answer **all** of the application questions completely and submit your application on time - incomplete or late applications will not be considered. Take some time to edit your answers to make sure they are clear and thoroughly explain what you need help with. Get in touch early if you have questions.



- Demonstrate how your garden supports the community - show us photos, tell a story, tell us how you plan to keep the garden operationally sustainable and thriving year after year.
- In your application answers, tell us how your project proposal:
  - affects the garden long-term
  - increases attendance and engagement at your garden
  - reduces the need for continual inputs (money, materials, etc.) in the future
- Make it easy for us by doing your homework. For example, determine how many yards of compost you need ahead of time. Also, if delivery or shipping fees apply, include those in your estimates as well.
- Provide up to date contact information so we can get in touch with you when we need to and make sure someone shows up to your site visit (if necessary).

20. Once the project is complete, do I have to do anything else?

We may send you a feedback survey\* and/ or a request to share photos of your project being delivered, installed, or in use. With your permission, we might even share those photos or testimonials out to our networks. And speaking of networks, we love to be tagged in social media posts about the support you receive from this fund! Tag us: @growpittsburgh and @waterlandlife

21. What happens if the awarded project can't be completed because of an unforeseen event with our garden group?

On some occasions, awarded projects aren't able to move forward with their request. Stuff happens! Whenever possible, we will work with the applicant to identify other potential opportunities for support. If none exist, the applicant's award will be rescinded and they'll be encouraged to apply during the next round.

22. Who do I contact if I have questions?

All application questions and requests for paper applications can be directed to [Claire Matway](#), Grow Pittsburgh Community Garden Network Program Manager, 412-362-4769 ext. 203 or [claire@growpittsburgh.org](mailto:claire@growpittsburgh.org).