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Teaching Unit: People Make a Garden

Background

A broad base of support, within both your school and community, will help sustain your learning garden. Soliciting donations from local groups and businesses is more than a way of obtaining needed money and materials -- it also serves to publicize your program and to actively involve the community in supporting education.

In this unit project, students will introduce their school garden -- whether it's in the planning stages or already established -- to potential volunteers and donors.

Objectives: Students will:

- Learn about volunteerism and donations
- Identify various resources within the community
- Identify and interact with various people who will contribute to the school garden
- Practice writing, presentation, and communication skills

Standards addressed: [click here](#)

Materials: White board, chalkboard, overhead projector, or flip chart for recording student responses; catalogs and magazines

Central Concepts:

- **What does it mean to be a volunteer or a donor?** Students will define these terms, identify ways of giving, and why people give.
- **Marketing a cause.** Students will learn to communicate about the value of a school garden to their learning experience, and how donations and volunteer time are an investment in their education.

Discussion: Volunteers and Donors

Questions: What is a volunteer? What is a donor? Why do you think people give their time, money, and other resources? Have you ever been a volunteer or made a donation? How did it feel to you?

Volunteers are people who spend time working for free on projects and for organizations that do things they believe in. Examples: Someone who cares about animals spends time working at the humane society; someone who enjoys public television programming takes calls during fundraising drives. If students have been volunteers, find out what was positive and negative about the experience, and what they would like volunteers who work in their garden to experience (e.g., recognition, loyalty to and ownership in the project).

Donors are people and companies that give money or products to programs or causes. Examples: People donate money to American Lung Association because they want to help its anti-smoking campaign or fund research; companies give NGA money and materials to pass on to schools through grant and award programs because they are interested in supporting school gardening and plant-based education. Donors give because it makes them feel good to nurture a project they care about. Giving also helps businesses and companies build a good reputation with their customers and the public. Ask students if they have made donations. If so, find out what was positive and negative about their experience, and what they would like their garden donors to experience.

Questions: Are there people or groups in the surrounding community who would help with the garden if they knew about it? What kind of support might each offer us?

Encourage students to name businesses or municipal offices in the neighborhood, even the corner gas station/quick-stop, and consider what resources they might be able to provide. (Remind them that not all assistance is provided through dollars: In-kind gifts and services can prove extremely valuable!) List



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As a thank you for supporting NGA with a donation of \$30 or more, we are happy to offer the following:

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COMMENTS?

We welcome your questions and comments about this newsletter or your membership. Please reply to: [NGA editor](#).

students' responses on the board or chart. Some examples:

- parents, neighbors, Master Gardeners, churches/synagogues: labor, rototilling, transportation, plants, gardening advice
- municipal parks department: mulch, compost
- garden center: design help, plants, pots, mulch, compost, soil
- gas station/quick stop: gas for tiller, snacks for workday
- fire or police department: volunteer time to build raised beds
- high school: student community service time
- copy/mailing service: paper for posters, laminated garden signage, mailing expenses
- senior center: gardening advice, mentoring (and appreciative garden visitors!)

Question: What can we tell/show these people about our garden project that would get them excited about it and encourage them to get involved?

If your class has a learning garden or has worked with plants indoors, they can talk about how these experiences helped them learn.

If yours is a brand new project, ask kids to talk about the benefits of other hands-on learning experiences they've had, how a garden can support their studies, and plans or ideas you have for your garden project. (Don't forget the skills used and built by creating recruitment proposals -- evidence that the garden supports the curriculum across all the subjects!)

It's also very important to state ways that the garden project can benefit the rest of the community -- by providing a beautiful place to visit, habitat for wildlife, and so on. (The Human-Environment Research Lab at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign offers research summaries that illustrate how plants, parks, and gardens improve quality of life for people and neighborhoods. [Visit their Web site](#) for details.)

They might also highlight the fun volunteers can have by meeting other gardeners, enjoying the outdoors, bringing beauty to the schoolyard and community. They'll also serve as good examples for future volunteers -- the students themselves.

Question: How can we thank our donors and volunteers?

Celebrate and acknowledge your donors in word and print. This might include student-produced certificates, banners, invitation to a "garden party" at the dedication or opening of the garden, press releases to local media, and so on.

Assignment: Create Recruitment and Donation Proposals

Create project folders or PowerPoint CDs that you can leave with each potential donor and volunteer. These will show that your effort is well organized and that the program has the full support of the school.

Break the class into small groups. Tell students that they are taking on the role of a "development team" (people who cultivate support for projects). They are to create a proposal to raise awareness of and support for the garden program.

The proposal should be organized and specific, as well as creative and original. A few words can say a lot -- prompt students to be concise in their writing. Their proposals should include:

1. what the project is
2. the goals/intended use of the project
3. what benefits the project will provide to the school/students as well as the neighborhood
4. a personal statement of appeal saying why the project is important to them
5. what they want the reader to do/what they want them to consider giving
6. a thank-you to the reader for their time

Have each group work on different parts of the presentation, using the notes from your discussion.

Group 1. Project Overview. This is where students should address the first three items from the list above. Write a description of the garden and what you can learn there. If you have a drawing of your plan, include it as well.

Group 2: Volunteer Recruitment. This portion should cover items 3 through 5 from the list above. Collect the names and contact information of potential volunteers. If you know someone who has a beautiful garden, or is an expert in a particular kind of gardening, include a handwritten note recognizing this fact with their copy of the proposal. List the people who already support the project. Let volunteers know that you will thank them publicly for their generosity.

Group 3: Donor Requests. This portion should also address items 3 through 5 from the list above.

Gather names and addresses of potential donors. Use the list you brainstormed to create a proposal page for each business or organization you plan to approach stating specific needs. Draw or use pictures from catalogs, magazines, or Web sites to represent of these items or services. If you have already received some donations or volunteer help, mention these. Assure them that all donors will be announced and thanked publicly.

Group 4. Supporting Information. Obtain a letter of support from the principal, teacher, or garden coordinator. Assemble photos, drawings, and quotes from students about the benefits of school gardening and what it means to them.

Cover Letter. Once you have all the pieces assembled, draft a cover letter that briefly encapsulates the purpose of your proposal, lists the elements in the folder, and thanks the reader in advance for taking the time to consider your project (item 6 from the list above).

Teacher note: Somewhere in the proposal, perhaps in the cover letter, include the tax status of your school or organization and the name businesses should use when making out checks.

Assignment: Making Presentations

In-Person Presentation. Presenting your folders in person will make the biggest impact. Have students practice making presentations to classmates first. They can critique one another, and hone both their presentation skills and the proposal itself. Challenge presenters with questions so they are prepared to answer questions "live."

- **Walk and Talk.** If it's feasible, take the class on a walk through the neighborhood to share the folders with businesses and targeted volunteers. (As you walk, have students survey the area for any other organizations, offices, you might have missed in your brainstorming session (e.g., bank, post office, hair salon). Ask students to keep this question in mind: *What kind of support might each be able to offer?*)
- **Present to a Group.** Invite your potential donors/volunteers to a class meeting where students can make their case to everyone at once. Or, find out if you can present at a meeting of the chamber of commerce, Master Gardeners, or other likely resource.

Mailing Presentations. Mailing proposals raises different challenges. You might want to show students how much mail you receive, or take them to the office and witness how much comes to the entire school every day.

Challenge students to consider: How can you make your proposal stand out in the mailbox? Then, once someone opens it, how do you encourage them to view it, and then to respond?

(Examples: decorate and address the envelopes by hand; decorate the cover letter; provide a phone number and e-mail address that readers can respond to; ask them to respond by a specific date.)

Follow-Up. However you deliver your proposals, follow-up is important. Send letters to each person to thank them for attending your presentation, for committing help, or to make sure they have received and read your proposal.

Also, make sure you fulfill any promises you've made to your volunteers and donors, and keep them informed of the progress of your project via a Web page or mailings.

Assignment: Future Donors and Volunteers

Have each student write a final personal essay about how the experience of working with donors and volunteers influenced their attitudes about adopting these roles themselves. Or, have students keep a journal throughout the process to record their thoughts and see how they change over time. Share a compilation of essays with the donors and volunteers.

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