

## **Grow Pittsburgh's Community Garden Program APPLICATION FAQs**

### **When do I need to submit my application?**

You can begin your application process at any time. We review potential projects in the fall in consideration for the following year. If you submit a complete application by November 1 your project will be considered for a Spring build the following year. If you submit a complete application after November 1, your project will be considered for a Fall build the following year. We encourage groups to get in touch early and often throughout the process as it may take considerable time to gather the necessary requirements.

### **Why would you choose some applications over others?**

Our deciding factors include: staff availability, budget, location, demonstrated community need, and demonstrated community support. We want to make sure our team can devote enough time and energy to each garden in our program so that garden can be successful. We also may be limited by our budget for the upcoming year. At a certain point in the year, our funds may be already allotted and we will need to start looking at the following year for new garden projects.

We need to see that a prospective garden group has the capacity and the community support needed to build a successful garden. Make sure in your application to demonstrate the people, organizations, nearby gardens and municipal offices that support this project and how they will continue to support your project in the future. Make sure the small group of people in your garden leadership team have the capacity to work together regularly on a project for at least the next 3-6 months and have a plan to ensure that new people will be engaged and join the team throughout that time. To a certain extent, our support can help you build capacity within your leadership team and also throughout your neighborhood, but it takes time to build support and credibility in a neighborhood. Our program is designed so that the outreach and community support comes before the garden is built.

### **What kinds of gardens do you fund?**

We fund new community food gardens that generally fall within three categories: 1) allotment gardens, where people rent individual plots; 2) community gardens, where people are cultivating the same space together; 3) combination gardens, which incorporate both of these.

We also may fund existing gardens in need of a major overhaul or expansion.

If you are part of an *established* garden in need of support, we suggest you apply to the Community Garden Sustainability Fund. This fund helps gardens complete projects small and large that contribute to long term sustainability.

### **What does the Community Gardens program provide to applicants?**

We will help you establish your garden organizing group, set up volunteer days, and create processes that will lead to future sustainability of the garden. We provide materials like tools,

soil, raised beds, tool storage, a water line, signage, plants, seeds, and fencing. We provide educational support through workshops and demonstrations.

That being said, it is important for garden groups to learn how to do these things independently as much as possible during the program, so that by the time that the garden graduates from our program everyone will know what to do to keep the garden running smoothly.

### **How soon could we build a garden after we are accepted into Phase 1?**

Keep in mind that each garden group can progress through the phases at the pace that suits them best. Assuming that a garden group is meeting regularly and is able to progress through the phases efficiently, it is possible that a garden build can happen in as little as 3 months upon acceptance into Phase 1. We recommend taking the time to build a strong support network that will last for years to come.

### **What does knotweed look like? Why don't I want it in the garden?**

See more info here: <http://www.growpittsburgh.org/japanese-knotweed/>

### **What if my application is incomplete?**

Fill out as much information as you can. The process of going through the application can give you a better idea of what you have in place and what still needs to happen. Plus, even if you aren't accepted into the program, the more we know about your garden project, the more we can help you! Sometimes it can take years to get the right combination of people and land to create a garden. In the meantime, you can volunteer at other gardens in your area, build skills, build relationships, seek out the best possible location, etc.

### **What if I want to start a school garden?**

Apply for our Learning Garden Program. You can find more information on our website: [www.growpittsburgh.org](http://www.growpittsburgh.org).

### **What responsibilities do partner organizations have?**

Partner organizations provide stability as garden leadership changes over time. These organizations may provide fiscal sponsorship, meeting space, supplies, grant writing, event outreach, volunteer recruitment, etc. The sponsor organization is also generally the one to cover the garden under liability insurance. The organization would want to ask their insurance broker what it might cost to add the garden as a "rider" onto their existing insurance. This is typically a small expense.

### **Can I sell produce that I grow at the garden?**

It depends on the site location and ownership of the land. Ask us for more details.

### **What do I need to know about soil testing?**

We will test all sites that apply for our program before we start building. If you want to test your site in the meanwhile, you can find information on how to take samples and where to send them

for testing in our Grower's Resources section:

<http://www.growpittsburgh.org/start-a-garden/growers-resources/soil-compost/>

### **What kind of insurance do I need to protect the garden?**

The City of Pittsburgh requires gardens located on city property to carry insurance. We strongly encourage groups to pursue insurance for any community garden to protect the group and landowner from liability. Depending on the type of activities you plan to do at the garden, you may want to carry more or less insurance. Please review the insurance info on this page:

<http://www.growpittsburgh.org/start-a-garden/community-garden-guide/finding-a-suitable-site/>

### **What if the garden I want to start is on a religious institution's property?**

As long as membership is not restricted based on religious affiliation, this is okay.

### **Can I apply for a community garden on privately owned property?**

Unfortunately, no. But whether the garden is publicly or privately owned, established gardens can apply for our Community Garden Sustainability Fund, which provides materials and technical support.

### **How do I get access to a potential site?**

To get access, you must first know who owns the site. Sometimes you will already know who owns the site; however, if you don't know who owns the site, or if you aren't sure, there are a few ways to find this information:

1. First, confirm the ownership of the site by using the County Assessment website (<http://www2.county.allegheny.pa.us/RealEstate/Search.aspx>). You can find out who the owner is and if the land is made up of multiple parcels.
2. The Lots to Love website makes it easy to understand the ownership of vacant lots. <http://www.lotstolove.org>
3. For City of Pittsburgh-owned lots, check out the Adopt-A-Lot program here: <http://pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/adopt-a-lot> or by contacting Shelly Danko+Day, VLTK Project Coordinator, at [shelly.dankoday@pittsburghpa.gov](mailto:shelly.dankoday@pittsburghpa.gov) or 412-255-2287.
4. Other municipalities in Allegheny County will have their own processes for permitting residents to use their vacant land. The best place to start is generally the borough or township manager, who will know how to navigate site access.

## **Questions Specific to Gardens Located Outside City Limits**

### **What does it mean when it says that a garden located within Allegheny County but outside the City of Pittsburgh must be *eligible*?**

Garden sites within Allegheny County but outside the city of Pittsburgh are funded via federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds through Allegheny County Economic

Development. CDBG funds have additional restrictions about their use because it is federal money. Therefore, prospective gardens outside the City of Pittsburgh must be in areas where the number of households earning a low to moderate income is above a certain threshold. This threshold may change from year to year. Boroughs are divided by Census Tract and Block Group which are determined by the U.S. Census results that come out every 10 years. The lines that divide eligible Block Groups from ineligible ones are not always obvious. If you are considering a lot in a county borough, please get in touch with Grow Pittsburgh early in the process to determine if that lot is in fact eligible.

**What kind of support might a Borough provide to a garden?**

Boroughs sometimes provide the land for gardens in parks or borough-owned lots. Borough maintenance crews sometimes perform duties at the garden like grass mowing, installing signs, and making repairs. Boroughs may pay for the water for the garden, and provide meeting space or bathroom access.