cultivating young leaders

A Workbook for Growing a Youth-Led Cooperative Garden Business

by City Blossoms
cultivating young leaders

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in collaboration with the U.S. Botanic Garden

United States Botanic Garden
City Blossoms is a nonprofit dedicated to cultivating the well-being of our communities through creative programming in kid-driven gardens. Washington, D.C. is our home base, where we innovate new resources, approaches, and techniques. Applying our unique brand of gardens, science, art, healthy living, and community building, we “blossom” in neighborhoods where kids, their families, and neighbors may not otherwise have access to green spaces.

www.cityblossoms.org

United States Botanic Garden

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(Gracias, Gracias, Gracias, Friends)

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And finally, thank you to all the super talented Youth Staff who have helped build a magical business that brings joy, food, and friendship to our communities.
Giving back to my community is one of my passions in life, as I want to ensure the continued health of the community that has allowed me to unlock my own potential. To fulfill this commitment, I serve the community through the Mighty Greens. Mighty Greens is a garden-based youth cooperative at Cardozo Education Campus in Washington, D.C. It is also a part of City Blossoms, which is a nonprofit dedicated to fostering healthy communities by developing creative, kid-driven green spaces. In Mighty Greens, there are no roles assigned to individuals, but rather, everyone collectively plans the planting process from start to finish—planting seeds in the greenhouse, transferring the seedlings to the farm outside, and selling or providing them to the community once they are ready.

I have volunteered with Mighty Greens since fall 2016 and have learned many things that have made me a better student and person. Through this program, I have learned to plant and care for many types of plants, fruits, and vegetables. I have watched seedlings transform into healthy food that sustains my community and provides much needed nourishment to many people who would not otherwise have access to affordable, healthy food.

Participating in Mighty Greens has allowed me to gain confidence in public speaking. English is my third language, and my communication skills have improved because I often must explain the mission of Mighty Greens to others. Harvesting food with my fellow volunteers touches my heart because I know that we are an important piece of the puzzle that is providing healthy food to the D.C. community.

Mighty Greens teaches people how to cook and make profitable products, such as dried herb salts, teas, and body lotions. These trade skills help to prepare people for careers in the gardening and farming industries. It also allows students like me to socialize with other people by allowing us to interact with the community that we are serving. Seeing a smile on someone’s face makes me feel appreciated and lets me know that my service is making a difference to others.

Ultimately, the skills that I have gained from volunteering with Mighty Greens have helped me to obtain a job in a local high-end restaurant. Knowing that my community is being educated, getting jobs, and staying healthy drives me to serve them even more.

Eden Amare, Mighty Greens Youth Staff Member
CITY BLOSSOMS: OUR HISTORY

In the summer of 1997, Rebecca Lemos-Otero took a job leading a summer camp for kids at CentroNia, an early childhood center in her Columbia Heights neighborhood in Washington, D.C. The 18-year-old had no idea what she was getting herself into. CentroNia, a center and community in which she herself had grown up, tasked Rebecca and the campers with cleaning up an overgrown garden plot. Not knowing anything about gardening, but excited to play outside, Rebecca and the kids slowly started transforming the space. They spent the season weeding, planting, painting, and figuring out how to turn various types of free containers into growing spaces. Kids began to come up with ideas about what to grow and paint, and how to experiment with new growing options. Neighbors stopped by and offered advice from their own youth and agricultural experiences, and to just have a pleasant chat. At the end of the summer, the abandoned plot had become a lush safe haven filled with yummy food, bright flowers, and kid-made art installations. The garden continued far beyond the summer and Lola Bloom, another counselor, joined Rebecca. As the space grew, the two young women learned that a garden can be so much more than just a beautiful place to sit. If given the opportunity, children and youth can use gardens as tools to express themselves and connect with their communities. By tending and transforming their garden, the young campers became leaders who cultivated the wellbeing of their communities that summer.

Over the next ten years, Lola and Rebecca kept developing the idea that this garden, and others like it, could be an answer to the multifaceted challenges that their community was facing. They maintained the garden in front of CentroNia, and, every year, diverse groups of community members would utilize the space and add to it. In 2008, Lola and Rebecca took the plunge and turned their radical project into a nonprofit organization that they named City Blossoms. Since 2008, the organization has been dedicated to the idea that kid-led green spaces are an investment in the holistic wellbeing of the kids who create them, and in the communities where they exist.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Today, City Blossoms is a leader in the field of community-focused, equitable green spaces and culturally-connected, garden-based education. City Blossoms has designed, developed, collaborated, and provided programming or trainings for hundreds of green spaces throughout Washington D.C. and nationwide. City Blossoms’ model is unique because we view children and youth as leaders of their communities and as inspiring changemakers. We see green spaces as places of opportunity to build stronger relationships with the natural environment, take healthy risks, and connect with each other as creators and stewards. The Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative (YEC) is one of City Blossoms’ five interwoven programs.
The YEC program is designed for high school-aged youth. It grew out of a series of questions: What would happen if young people were able to start, manage, and grow their own environmentally-driven business? Would the business thrive? Would other community members benefit? Could the work of running this business support the development of new skills that are useful in the youth’s post high school lives?

These questions led staff at City Blossoms to start a small seasonal project with a handful of young people in 2014. The first group of youths decided to name their business Mighty Greens, an apt choice. Since then, Mighty Greens has grown into a year-round multi-school program with hundreds of youths participating every year. We call it a “business on training wheels” because it provides youth a safe space to cultivate skills, take chances, and receive coaching. Once established, the Mighty Greens business did so well that the young people were able to pay themselves from their profit. Today, the Mighty Greens business sells seedlings, fresh produce, and value-added products like teas, soaps, lotions, and salts. Almost all of Mighty Greens Youth Staff are young people of color from schools in the District with 100% free and reduced lunch. They make a total profit of approximately $11,000. Part of their business’s mission is to give back to their community, so they also donate over one-third of their produce and value-added products to churches, community members, and food banks. Mighty Greens Youth Staff members have received invitations to present at regional conferences, sit on panels, and advise policy makers.

**SHARING OUR YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP COOPERATIVE MODEL**

Over the years, we have received a lot of interest and inquiries about our approach to working with young people and about our YEC program in particular. We were thrilled to work with the staff of the U.S. Botanic Garden to create this workbook that shares our strategies, lessons learned, and successes. Throughout this text, we will provide guiding questions to help the reader develop their own unique adaptation of this program. We’ve included stories from our years of supporting Mighty Greens in addition to the Youth Staff’s perspectives about their own experiences. Finally, we’ve included templates and tools that we wish someone could have shared with us when we were first starting off.

If you find this information helpful, end up doing something really cool yourself, have questions, or just happen to be in the neighborhood one day, please contact us and let’s swap stories and experiences! Until then, we hope you enjoy this guide and wish you and your amazing team of young, green entrepreneurs the best of luck.

Thanks! Gracias!

The City Blossoms Team
cityblossoms.org
how to use this guide

Dear Reader-with-a-Dream,

This is not a curriculum providing step-by-step instructions but, rather, a workbook that anyone interested in connecting youth, gardens, and entrepreneurship can fill in with their own unique input in order to design something that fits them.

THE FLOW
This workbook is organized into chapters that build on one another. We start with the foundational pieces to help your organization or school prepare itself to facilitate a program of this nature. We then move into optional aspects that we have included in our Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative (YEC) program, which work well for us but might not fit for you and your community of young people. The last chapter will take a deeper look at how all of these pieces work in practice for Mighty Greens. Finally, in the appendix, we provide templates, references, and resources that we hope you will find useful.

SIDEBARS
Throughout each chapter, you will see four sidebars: Lessons Learned, Key Concepts, Sample Exercises, and Power Skills. Each sidebar digs deeper into the YEC program and the concepts being discussed.

LESSONS LEARNED
Lessons learned are stories from Mighty Greens’s and City Blossoms’s experiences.

POWER SKILLS
Power skills are the behavioral skills that are key to performing future jobs and navigating society. Often, people call them soft skills, but, due to the importance of developing such capacities, some are now calling them “power skills” (Bersin, 2020). See Power Skills Table on page 63.

EXAMPLE EXERCISE
These sample lessons are templates to help get you started with youth on a particular skill or concept.

KEY CONCEPTS
This section will include a summary of the key points within the chapter. Each point supports designing lesson plans, next steps, and highlighting key terms.
“No words can express the experience I have had, the joy I felt during the times in the garden, and the amount of support that has been given to me and my peers. I had a fantastic experience being in the garden, at the market, and talking to other people who have their own business and were kind enough to share their wisdom. All I can say is thanks to my teammates, my coworkers, and my friends.” Ta’Jhaun, Mighty Greens Youth Staff

INTRODUCTION TO THE MODEL
The Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative (YEC) program model is designed to enable participants a chance to join a “business on training wheels” by leveraging existing infrastructure (space, product knowledge, equipment, veteran students, and staff) from year to year. This allows participants to walk into a business structure that has already been designed by previous youth but still holds space for them to use their own creativity to grow the company, experiment, and to see the impact of their work. This program teaches youth to be creative and courageous by taking measured risks without having to worry about negatively impacting the business too drastically.
The goal of this model is to create a safe and engaging space for youth to develop academic, entrepreneurial, and socio-emotional skill sets that will support them throughout the rest of their lives. The opportunity to cultivate power skills like leadership, cooperation, and creativity is something that will support them wherever they go.

A significant aspect to this program is the fact that it allows students to make and handle money. The entrepreneurial aspect of this model gives youth the opportunity to make a profit which can be very exciting but also comes with a lot of responsibility for the program manager. The basics of running a business—how to turn a profit, balance a budget, and talk to customers—create a wealth of learning opportunities.

The cooperative aspect of the program is an equally important pillar to entrepreneurship. Why not just a regular business? Cooperatives have a long history of use—especially by people of color—to support the holistic wellness of communities. This model isn’t about teaching students to become independently wealthy, it’s about creating a business that uplifts each of its members and the community.

The final component of this program is the physical space where youth meet. The main spaces where City Blossoms staff support Mighty Greens Youth Staff to run their business are gardens and greenhouses at their schools. This might not be an option for you and your program, and that is not a problem. The goal is to be intentional about cultivating a safe space where cooperative decision making and innovation can flourish.

**Let’s get started!**

**BUILDING SAFE SPACE**

Where you hold your programming will depend on what type of business the youth are running, when programming takes place, how youth get to the space, and what resources you have. The development of the space will happen over time as the youth further define what they need from a space and how they want it to look. As you create this space, think about the following:

- Does it feel warm, inviting, and welcoming?
- Is there a gathering area for a group?
- What are your options for storage? You might need to store tools or products.
- And, most importantly, is this space a safe environment?

Even if you can’t create a space that holds all of the things your youth-led business needs in one place, having a home base where youth begin their time together is essential for consistency, retention, and ownership over their business.

**CONSIDERING CAPACITY**

Time, money, space, knowledge, and people power—these are all things to consider before diving into cultivating a youth-centric program. Defining capacity is important because you want to create clear boundaries about what is actually possible before youth begin brainstorming. Outlining capacity early on is critical so that youth have a clear sense of where they can go with their business. Some things to consider:

- Does someone at your organization or school have the capacity to take this on as a full-time or part-time job?
- Who makes up your network and what kind of time commitment do they have?
- What are your network’s superpowers? (“Superpowers” are unique strengths that each individual brings to the business.)
- What youth-focused programs already exist in your community? Can you connect with those programs and collaborate?
- Do you have initial seed money? Will you ask for donations? Does your organization or school have funding for materials and for money to cover your time? Will you pay yourself?
- Do you have access to physical meeting space that is convenient for youth?
SETTING EXPECTATIONS AND ESTABLISHING OPEN COMMUNICATION

Consistency, regular communication, and clear expectations make up the bedrock of a strong youth program. As a youth-led business, the youth should have many opportunities to define and iterate what the expectations are for themselves and their peers. As a group, decide what the expectations are for group discussions, welcoming new peers, coming to work, using the space, and interacting with each other in general. Once you decide community norms, create clear, written expectations that can be displayed in the space. You and the youth can define how often these expectations are revisited and revised. Having clear signage near the entrance of the space that explains programming hours, how to get involved, who to contact, and/or any upcoming events will also help with communication, retention, and maintaining consistency.

CREATING AN INTENTIONAL AND JOYOUS CULTURE

For any YEC-like model to be successful, we’re convinced that there needs to be a culture that supports self-expression and community-building. No matter what your youth program focuses on, the community that you create together is key to successful retention and recruitment. Creating a space and program culture that allows for exploration, knowledge-sharing, relationship-building, laughter, trust, and community-building is central to the success of this type of program. So, what are some of the ways your team might build community?

• Music—Try to have music playing when you’re doing activities. Youth could even think about creating a collective playlist that everyone can add to as a way to share music.
• Celebrations—Are there celebrations that your team can be a part of? If there isn’t an existing celebration to join, determine a good time of year to celebrate all of your hard work together. This may also be an opportunity to connect with other interested youth and the larger school community.
• Community Meals—Eat together! Think about having a monthly meal where youth get the chance to gather, cook, and share food together. This can be a wonderful way to forge strong connections.
• Artwork—Create and hang artwork around your space, especially youth-made art that conveys your community agreements or other aspects of the business. You can also hang photos or portraits of team members (past and present) to celebrate the diversity of perspectives and personalities that make up the cooperative.

LESSONS LEARNED

Why does City Blossoms have a “Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative” (YEC) program instead of a “Mighty Greens” program? Mighty Greens is definitely a better, snappier name—so what’s the deal? There are many benefits to separating the YEC program from the Mighty Greens business. 1) The youth can organize and design their business, including their brand, in the way that they want without having to coordinate with City Blossoms. 2) Creating a separate brand creates feelings of ownership. Mighty Greens Youth Staff can’t fully own the YEC program but they can fully own their Mighty Greens business. 3) If alumni of Mighty Greens ever wants to make their business-on-training-wheels into a real-world business, the separation makes that possible.
KEY CONCEPTS
The (Seriously Super Fun) Foundation of a Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative

Introduction to the Model
- The Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative (YEC) model was designed as a “business on training wheels” with the goal of creating safe space to cultivate skills and community.
- What version of this model might make sense for you to explore?

Building Safe Space
- Where your program is held and the space you create will differ depending on the youth, community, and the type of business you run together.
- What does a safe, inviting, accessible space look like for you?

Considering Capacity
- What are your time, money, and space parameters?

Setting Clear Expectations and Establishing Open Communication with Everyone
- Consistency, clear expectations, and regular communication are key to creating a successful program.
- What do you expect of one another in this space and how do you make those expectations clear?

Creating an Intentional and Joyous Culture
- Any successful YEC-like model establishes a culture that fosters creativity, relationship-building, learning, and laughter.
- What are some ways that your team might build community?

Youth staff participating in Basil Bonanza, an annual celebration.
WHY COOPERATIVES
There are many benefits of creating a business with youth. Entrepreneurship creates space for youth to explore their interests, cultivate power skills, and generate some income for their work. Exploring entrepreneurship allows for the youth to learn and hone skills that they will very often use in years to come, though this program is not intended to direct all youth in necessarily becoming business owners after graduation. The hope is that youth will have an opportunity to explore important skills, understand entrepreneurial concepts, develop their leadership style, and take these abilities into their future endeavors.

The cooperative model gives participants the opportunity to receive a stipend based on participation and commitment to the program while ensuring that all participants are able to contribute and feel included, regardless of how recently they’ve joined the program or how much their...
daily life allows for participation. This model lends itself to a collaborative community environment and cultivates a feeling of ownership and pride in the business. The model emphasizes cooperation, empathy, and compassion—skills that are important for youth to exercise not only with one another, but as they take their next steps after high school. YEC draws on lessons from a long history of cooperatives that communities created when they did not have access to resources and wanted to build their own independent wealth. The cooperative model, as we touch on next, has a history of being a powerful tool for communities of color to address racism, to build wealth and opportunities, and to ensure equal participation and ownership. Civil Rights leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois and Ella Jo Baker were advocates for cooperative economics as tools for building inclusive workplaces. The YEC program honors cooperatives long history by creating opportunities for youth of color to build workforce skills through a cooperative model that fosters a supportive environment. In this environment, youth are able to generate a profit and develop their expertise as urban gardeners and entrepreneurs. The cooperative model gives young people a way to foster their creative leadership, by ensuring that community, collaboration, and cultural connections are at the heart of the YEC program.

**CONTEXT AND A SHOUT OUT:**
**A TOO-SHORT HISTORY OF COOPERATIVES IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**

A quick online search of “the history of cooperatives” will take you to several sites crediting the Rochdale Pioneers as the founders of the modern cooperative movement. The Rochdale Pioneers were a group of 28 cotton mill workers in England who started a modest home goods store in 1844. Frustrated by the low wages at the mill and unreasonable prices at the local store, they pooled their resources to purchase some basic household staples and offered them at a more affordable price than their competitors. Together, they formed the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society and held six values as their guiding principles: self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. These values would go on to inspire the formation of the International Co-operative Alliance just over 50 years later in 1895 (International Cooperative Alliance, n.d.).

Now, if you were to do an image search on the history of cooperatives, you’d see that the folks of the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society, who we credit with the invention of the cooperative model, are all middle-aged white males. This doesn’t paint an accurate picture of the true history of cooperatives and erases the very critical role that women and communities of color played in shaping cooperative economic thought. Long before 1844, communities of color utilized the power of cooperatives to overcome racially-biased economic discrimination in order to create strong and resilient, community-centric economies based on trust, transparency, and mutual respect. American political economist, Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard, wrote Collective Courage, an in-depth and compelling history of African American cooperative economic thought and practice (Nembhard, 2014), and we at City Blossoms consider her book required reading. We have relied on her work heavily to inform our own, and we draw from it to enhance our understanding of the history of cooperatives in communities of color.
Perhaps what makes the history of cooperatives in communities of color so compelling is that the model is rooted in the idea of community power, and the belief that no one is too insignificant to contribute in a meaningful way. Though there are still stories yet to be uncovered, and Dr. Nembhard believes that “the history of African American cooperative ownership demonstrates that Black Americans have been successful in creating and maintaining collective and cooperatively owned enterprises that not only provided economic stability but also developed many types of human and social capital and economic independence” (Nembhard, 2014, p. 24). That’s a pretty powerful history for youth to draw from and build upon!

COOPERATIVE RULES: SETTING INTENTIONS FOR THE SPACE

Cooperatives are able to function effectively because of clear, routine, and robust conversation. Conversations should be framed by the cooperative’s inherent values of respect for all voices in the room. To help facilitate a strong practice of communication in your cooperative here are some things to consider:

• What kind of space do you have, and does it encourage dialogue?
• How can you make that space feel safe for youth to fully express themselves?
• What are the barriers to effective communication in your group? Does everyone speak the same language? Does everyone feel comfortable speaking in public?
• What are the non-verbal ways that you can encourage communication?

It’s important to think through your intention in creating this program. Is the intention to form a community of students? Is it to help young people get jobs? Is it to generate revenue and distribute resources? Whatever the core goal is, make sure everyone takes the time to discuss it and is on the same page.

FORMING A COMMUNITY OF ENTREPRENEURS

One of the most powerful aspects of the YEC model is its focus on internal community-building and communal leadership. Collective decision-making and the importance of every person’s voice are of continual importance. There is no formal hierarchy within the program, though students who have been with the program longer are encouraged to act as mentors to newer participants. Below, we’ve listed some of the ways that we make sure to weave community-building into regular activities. These tools help us make space for youth to take the lead in forming their community norms.

• Beginning and ending programming with a check-in activity to cultivate kindness and facilitate the youth learning about one another
• Incorporating moments for meditation and mindfulness
• Celebrating each young person’s superpowers!
• Utilizing music, community meals, and celebrations to create an environment that emphasizes joy and connection

POWER SKILLS

• Leadership
• Communication
• Collaboration
• Empathy
• Identity Development
KEY CONCEPTS
Cooperatives, The Power of the Hive (Bzzz Bzzz)

Why Cooperatives
• The cooperative model allows for youth to participate in the way that works for them, their families, and other interests. This model also lends itself to creating a collaborative community and a strong sense of ownership in the business, in addition to honing social-emotional skills.

Context and a Shout Out: A Too-Short History of Cooperatives in Communities of Color
• Read Collective Courage by Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard.
• How can this history inspire and inform your team as they develop their own business?

Cooperative Rules: Setting Intentions for the Space
• Clear, regular, and robust conversations are at the heart of cooperative businesses.
• What do these practices look like for you?

Forming a Community of Entrepreneurs
• Entrepreneurship allows youth to hone skills that they will use for years to come. It gives them the chance to explore entrepreneurial concepts and develop their own leadership style.
• Collective decision-making and making space for everyone’s voices to be heard are central to the YEC model.
• What regular activities and practices can be incorporated into your team culture that encourage entrepreneurship?

First youth staff cohort at Eastern Senior High School.
chapter III

growing a program from scratch

“People in this program motivate me to keep coming back. This is a place for mindfulness.”  Candice, Mighty Greens Youth Staff

RECRUITING YOUNG PEOPLE

Building the first cohort of this youth-led business will take time, and connecting with different people in your community is essential. Initially collaborating with a specific class, organization, set of teachers, group of parents, or after-school club may help to spread the word. If you are working in a school, consider your school system’s requirements for community service. Offering community service hours for time spent working in the business may encourage youth to try out the program. You could also consider connecting with guidance counselors who may be able to present this as an option for students to develop career-building skills. The first group of youth who participate in this program will help to shape the business and define the program. They will also be able to help determine the ideal number of participants, what times and locations are best for
gathering, how to build consistency, and what consistency means for their program. The youth participating will have the best sense of timing, how often to meet, group size, etc. Create space for them to answer some of these logistical questions and to co-design the program with you. Here are some initial questions to consider:

- Are there particular days that work well for youth? Everyone is going to have different schedules, but sometimes there are days when most youth won’t be able to attend. For instance, are there any days when many of the young people have some sort of commitment, or are Fridays a day when they leave the building right after school? Answering these questions might help you come up with the best schedule for your group.
- What timing is best? Sometimes, right after school, youth need to touch base with their teachers or make up an assignment. Does it make sense to start 15-30 minutes after school ends to account for this?
- How long does programming need to last in order to feel like you have enough time to get things done?
- Are youth committing to be at every session or only a certain number of hours? Can they choose to attend as it’s possible? If youth need to complete a certain number of hours, this may make the program less accessible to some who are interested but have other commitments.

- If you decide to allow for more flexible attendance, how do you account for this when making decisions and designating roles and responsibilities?
- Having a core group of youth who are more consistent will allow you to take on larger projects as a group. Even so, how do you balance different roles and ensure that everyone who participates feels that they have a share in the business and a voice?
- No matter what type of routine and participation model you decide on, having it clearly defined and communicated will help to determine clear group expectations and maintain consistency.

So, how do recruitment strategies and program design influence retention and participation? More opportunities for youth to define and build the business will lead to increased feelings of ownership, which encourages continued participation and also may inspire youth to invite their friends into the project. The most effective recruitment strategies often include youth bringing a friend or speaking to peers about the work that they are doing. They are going to do the best job of articulating why they are a part of this type of project and telling peers what about the business makes it special. Creating opportunities for new participants to see the business in action is a great way to spark interest as well. Opportunities to sell or share information at school holiday markets or to invite people to join for product-making might also be a good way to share the program more widely.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

At Mighty Greens, we opted to have a more flexible attendance policy to acknowledge the fact that youth have other things, like school work, jobs, and family obligations, to balance. Having a more flexible policy led to better program fit and retention over the course of a year. We communicate expectations about attendance on a regular basis.
ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS
This work takes many hands, so when you’re establishing partnerships with a school or other entities, find a community of supporters for the young people in your program. A network of supporters will be essential to recruitment, the longevity of the program, and will serve as a key knowledge-base from which to draw. The more people invested in this program, the more sustainable it will be. Everyone who joins the project will likely have skill sets that are helpful in supporting this work. A network of cheerleaders and supporters is essential. This network could include anyone from local entrepreneurs open to speaking with youth about business, to a guidance counselor who shares information about your program with students. Here are some things to think about when you are building your network:

• Budget time to develop new relationships or expand existing ones.
• Budget time to meet in person with partner organizations and/or schools, and draft supporting documentation like Letters of Intent to bring structure to partnership discussions. Consider how you can build a mutually beneficial relationship. How can you support your partner?
• Make sure to discuss where there is space and time for growth if you hope that this will be a multi-year program. If not, discuss how the project and partnership will be completed and closed out when needed.
• Ask yourself: who is in your community and how can you get them involved? It’s important to avoid building your program in a silo.

• Connect with other schools or existing organizations in order to boost recruitment efforts.
• Find a diverse group of allies if you are in a school: teachers, administrative staff, custodial staff, counselors, coaches, other community-based organizations, etc. Young people have diverse and complex needs and you can’t meet all of them. Your program needs a network to get started and youth also need a network of support.

LESSONS LEARNED
At City Blossoms, we are big believers in being invited into a community before creating a new program, garden, or partnership. At the outset, we check ourselves and communicate deeply with our partners to make sure the City Blossoms program is actually what the community wants, especially if it is a group of people we haven’t worked with before. This is important to us for two main reasons:

1) We want to create genuine relationships that do not feel pressured or forced, and we don’t want to enter into relationships that are designed more for our own benefit than our partners’. For example, it can be easy for some nonprofits to fall into the trap of trying to show growth and “success” to someone like a funder by creating new, uninvited, unnecessary projects. We want our projects to be mutually beneficial and we want to design them to create something that truly reflects the community with which we’re partnering. This approach tends to result in us being invited back year after year.

2) When we are invited, it is usually reflective of the fact that our potential collaborators are ready to partner with us and take on whatever responsibilities and expectations may come from that relationship. Managing a garden or a new program is a lot of work. An unhealthy collaboration is one where you are left feeling buried in that work. When people invite us in, it usually means there is a genuine interest in and capacity for the project, and they feel like we may be a good fit for something they want to do.

School Garden Coordinator, Steve Donkin, helps youth staff make value-added products.
UNITING SUPERPOWERS—KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND ROLES

Like any project, it takes a network of people working together to create a successful YEC model. Therefore, before you dive into creating the program, take time to establish who the key stakeholders are and define their roles. These roles are going to be unique to your program and your school community, but as you start here are some things to consider:

- **Youth:** Youth are the most integral piece of a youth-led business. Young people are the drivers of the program. They will become the experts of their craft, from production all the way through the sale of their products. In addition to making key business decisions, they also play a critical role in maintaining a safe space. Youth who have been with the program longer should be looked to as role models and leaders for newer participants. Community agreements should be developed as a team and revisited frequently as you welcome new students into the program. This helps maintain a strong commitment to upholding a supportive, youth-led community, which is a core value of the program. While you should consider many different voices as you build your program, youth voices should always be at the forefront to ensure that they are the ones shaping the experience.

- **Program Manager:** One person or several people may fill the role of program manager. Having this person (or people) who serves as the point person and supports youth in facilitating the program will help, especially as you are getting started. As a facilitator, this role is meant to support the youth as they create and maintain a safe space, troubleshoot problems, and make decisions about the business. The program manager maintains a careful balance, supporting the youth and also encouraging youth leadership. The program manager should be able to ask questions of the youth that help them think critically and ultimately lead them to think more deeply and reach more informed conclusions. The program manager is responsible for maintaining a safe space that will facilitate good communication among the students. Program managers can also set parameters that help narrow the scope of business decisions, but they should encourage youth leadership and decision making within these parameters.

LESSONS LEARNED

We call youth participants “Youth Staff,” because Mighty Greens is a business, and the term helps reinforce the youth’s responsibility and ownership. There is power in names and titles, so it’s important to take the time to figure out the words that best fit to describe the positions being created. This is particularly important for young people who may not have experienced employment before. We want to use a title that does not create hierarchy amongst participants while also cultivating a sense of commitment and focus. Also, by calling them Youth Staff we strive to build a pathway for growth within City Blossoms. Mighty Greens staff have been hired as City Blossoms staff and we hope to add a Mighty Greens alumni to our Board of Directors soon. Over time, Mighty Greens Youth Staff do not see themselves solely as part of a single City Blossoms program, but as collaborative partners in the organization.
LESSONS LEARNED

At City Blossoms, our Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative Program Manager facilitates Mighty Greens programming after school for several hours, two days a week, at each of the schools that we collaborate with. Our Program Manager also coordinates a summer program that hosts around 20 youths for 20–25 hours per week for six weeks. In addition to facilitating programming, the Program Manager is responsible for managing the YEC budget, ensuring that the gardens and greenhouses are maintained with the support of the school and youth, collecting data on the effectiveness of the program, and connecting with stakeholders and partners in the school and greater school community in order to enrich the program and youth experiences.

- **School Stakeholders:** If you are working within a school, connecting with as many stakeholders as possible is crucial. Teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and any other key community members are invaluable supporters of a program like this. Whether they’re the ones you ask when you need support fixing something, or the person you go to when you want to spread the word about an event, they are key to making connections and building important allyships. School stakeholders will be critical in connecting with interested youth and teachers who might want to be involved, in ensuring you have physical space to host programming, and in ultimately securing the longevity of a program like this. Depending on whether you’re on staff at the school or from an outside organization collaborating with a school, you may rely on school stakeholders differently. If you’re coming from an outside organization, you may find it helpful to have connections with many different school staff members including teachers, facilities staff, and administration.

School Garden Coordinator, Cassandra Bell, poses with youth staff from Eastern Senior High School.

LESSONS LEARNED

As an organization collaborating with multiple schools, City Blossoms works hard to maintain a strong network of relationships at each of the institutions with which we partner. Importantly, there is a teacher at each school partner who acts as the “School Garden Coordinator,” or, more generically, acts as the main point of contact between our organization and the school. They are the most involved school stakeholders and they build the foundation for connecting with other relevant stakeholders such as facilities personnel, guidance counselors, and members of the administration. It is especially useful to have support from the School Garden Coordinator when making requests for maintenance in school greenhouses or gardens, connecting with other educators, or promoting the program to a wider audience.
• Community Partners: External community partners comprise yet another essential component of a successful youth-led business. Community partners can include other organizations, neighbors, church groups, and local governmental agencies. Community partners can act as customers, share their skill sets with youth, and/or become mentors and role models for participants. Youth should always be involved in the process of identifying potential community partners. However, because of the turnover in youth, it is important for the Program Manager to sustain relationships with community partners for long-term success. By allowing youth to identify external partners, you are providing them a valuable opportunity to develop and strengthen networking skills. This is another way to reinforce that they are in control of the direction and development of their business. Additionally, when you identify partners, make sure that you are mindful of the demographic makeup of your group of collaborators. Representation is crucial and should reflect the diversity of backgrounds and identities that youth participants hold.

LESSONS LEARNED
Mighty Greens has a long-standing partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB). The CAFB feeds our community’s most vulnerable residents by providing meals, nutrition and wellness education, and urban demonstration garden experiences. Mighty Greens Youth Staff donate seedlings to the CAFB every year and host skills-sharing workshops to teach the CAFB participants how to grow seedlings. In exchange, the CAFB staff have given Mighty Greens Youth Staff lectures on how their organization works and provided tours of their facilities.

Now that we understand a bit about the infrastructure needed to establish a successful youth entrepreneurship cooperative, let’s dig deeper and uncover how to implement the key components of a youth-led business.

DESIGNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY
Have you seen programs with one strong advocate thrive for a few years and then decline or cease to exist after that person leaves? Often, programs like this can be tied to one enthusiastic parent, teacher, community advocate, or staff person who held much of the program’s key knowledge. As you build your program, think about how you can weave in sustainability from the start by creating a plan that passes on key knowledge to your eventual successor. It is important to have a few people share this knowledge so that when there is a transition, youth can still continue to run their business and not be negatively impacted. Strong program infrastructure also requires a transition plan to ensure that staffing transitions and organizational changes do not undermine program quality. In addition, youth will transition in and out of the program for many reasons—one being that they graduate! Think about what key pieces are essential to the program running smoothly, and how older youth can help pass the torch on to younger participants. It is often easier to track this information as you build the program, rather than having to think about it in the middle of a transitional phase. Here are some questions to consider to help avoid this problem:
• Who has enough information to facilitate the program? If there’s only one person who holds this information, how can you expand this to at least a few people?
• What’s where? Chances are, your program has all of the materials and tools you need to create your products or provide your service. Find a way to make sure that the location of key things doesn’t just live in one person’s head.
• What are the key events, markets, and school celebrations in which the youth-led business participates?
• Budget: How much initial funding do you need? How much funding do you need in year two and year three? How will you secure funding? Having a record of the past few years’ budgets will help new staff to understand the cost of the program and funding.
• What are the key components of day-to-day program functions? This might include hours and days in which youth participate, or the general flow of a day. An overall picture of programming throughout the year, in addition to any other key knowledge about running the program, is important to keep here.

• Who are the key points of contact to keep this program running? Keeping a record of who to contact for what will help with the transition if someone leaves, with covering the program if the program manager has to take a day off, or with delegating certain tasks to teammates.

• Where is your business plan? While the business plan should be youth-created and youth-implemented, since youth may transition in and out of the program, make sure to keep a copy somewhere for new participants and organization staff to reference.

• Do you have a record of where you order products or key ingredients?

• How do the youth make their products and where is this information kept?

LESSONS LEARNED
As a way to ensure sustainability of our programs, City Blossoms started to develop B.U.B.A. plans. B.U.B.A. stands for Beamed Up By Aliens—you know, for when someone suddenly leaves on an interstellar trip. This B.U.B.A. plan is actually a paperwork trail and a way for staffers to capture institutional knowledge in whatever form works best, such as a binder or online folder that is shared by all. School garden B.U.B.A. plan binders might include a timeline of programming throughout the year, planting plans for the garden, a clear outline of how the garden is maintained throughout the year, key contacts, a list of vendors where specific materials are from, and any other key components to pass on to new team members. In addition to the regular school garden B.U.B.A. plan, the YEC program and Mighty Greens B.U.B.A. plan includes records such as when the youth typically start growing seedlings for their seedling sales and important product recipes, so that their product stays consistent.

HOW’S IT GOING? FIGURE OUT EVALUATIONS THAT WORK FOR YOU
How do you know if your program is doing what it set out to do? Remember your intention-setting? Is it working? If so, how can you share that information with other people? You can keep your program in line with your goals and demonstrate your successes to others by developing monitoring strategies and evaluating your practices from the start. To begin creating your evaluation plan, here are some questions to consider:

• What are your indicators of success? If the intention of your program is to create a safe space for youth, an indicator would be whether youth feel safe. Another indicator might be the number of youth who come to your program or your retention rate. Maybe your intention is to help youth make money. A simple indicator is how much profit they are making. An easy way to start out with evaluating your program is by picking two to three quantitative indicators (i.e. number of youths, number of community partners, number of products sold, etc.) and one to two qualitative indicators (i.e. do the youth feel ownership over their business? Do they feel safe in the program?).

• How are you measuring those indicators of success? Measuring quantitative indicators can be as easy as an attendance sheet, a log of the number of products made and sold, or a revenue tracker. Qualitative indicators are a little harder to measure. A simple option is to ask students for feedback and record their results. Another option is to ask students to fill out a pre- and post-survey. Surveys should be as short as possible and you should give them out on a regular schedule, maybe at the beginning and end of the year. Youth should have as much time as they need to fill them out. They should also be in multiple languages, if necessary, and anonymous. Your goal as the program manager is to influence responses as little as possible. The more anonymity you can provide in your evaluation process, the more accurate the data.
Review and Reflect. Now that you have all this data, how do you use it to inform your program? It’s time to review, analyze, and compare your information. Is your attendance going up or down? How much money has the youth’s business made this year in comparison with last year? What are the youth saying in their surveys? These data tell a story about the success of your program. You can use it to adjust what you are doing or to demonstrate to others that you are accomplishing what you set out to do.

Monitoring and evaluation are important because they make your program stronger, but it can be an expensive and time-intensive process. When you’re first starting out, keep it simple! The most important part of evaluating your program is collecting data on a regular basis and setting deadlines for yourself to review the data you have collected; data collection and analysis should be a pillar of your program that stands from the beginning.

**KEY CONCEPTS:**
*Growing a Program from Scratch*

**Recruiting Young People:**
- Build your first cohort of youth!
- Make room for youth to shape the business and program from the beginning and incorporate their voices throughout the process.
- What does recruitment look like for your program?

**Establishing Partnerships**
- This work takes time and many hands. How are you building a network?
- Who else is doing related work and how can you collaborate?

**Uniting Superpowers—Key Stakeholders and Roles**
- Who are your key stakeholders and what are their roles?

**Designing for Sustainability**
- How are you building strong program infrastructure that can live beyond the founders?
- Where does key program knowledge live and how do you share it?

**How’s It Going? Figure Out Evaluations That Work for You**
- How do you know if your program is doing what it set out to do?
- How are you measuring success and reflecting on the data you collect?
- Consider choosing two to three quantitative metrics and one to two qualitative metrics when you first start out.

The Eastern Senior High School Garden.
chapter IV

building that youth-led start-up

“I know how to sell the produce and how to communicate when I sell products to people at markets. I know how to introduce the products and I have lots of experience with them”  Cat, Mighty Greens Youth Staff

There can be something so exciting about exercising your own imagination and creativity! It starts with designing a product or experience, grows into figuring out how to brand that idea, and culminates in finding other people who are enthusiastic about investing in your vision. That excitement is what drives the desire to establish a company. It’s a lot of work, but it’s also endlessly rewarding and it produces a feeling of accomplishment and perseverance. Each part of that process provides an experience that a young person might benefit from as they begin to think about their own potential. They can apply the skills they cultivated to their day-to-day life in the real world, which could help them to become independent adults. Establishing a youth-led business is a tangible and engaging way to facilitate opportunities in which young people can practice utilizing their voices, motivating a group of people, and solving complex problems as a group.
Because each organization and community is different, you will need to design your business to reflect the needs, interests, and strengths of everyone involved in order to be successful. This next section will provide program managers and youth with an overview of the steps that we found necessary when building a strong foundation for a business that was truly intertwined with youth voices. Throughout this chapter, we have charted the ways in which program activities connect to different entrepreneurial competencies, creating a balanced model that meets a team of youth where they are at, and encourages the cultivation of life skills.

ESTABLISHING THE COMPANY

So you’ve decided! A youth-led cooperative business would be a great fit for your organization or group of young people. You have already defined the parameters of the kind of project that your organization and program managers can comfortably support, and you’ve recruited the first cohort of potential youth. What’s next?

Meetings: From the very beginning, it is important to establish expectations of how the business environment differs from other extra-curricular programs that youth may be used to. Because this program is a hybrid—somewhere between an after-school club and a professional work setting—it is helpful to hold meetings that have defined expectations based on community agreements and group decision-making.

The meetings, in general, should:
• Occur regularly on dates that you have chosen as a team. Each meeting should have clear start and end times. We suggest 30–45 minutes.
• Have a standing agenda with recurring items to build familiarity with entrepreneurial topics. Recurring agenda items could include upcoming events, sales reviews, financial/budget updates, inventory discussions, etc. You should also make time in the agenda for discussing new business opportunities and other topics that specifically interest the group.
• Have a clear facilitator role modeled by the program manager and then turn it into a revolving position held by various youth. It can also be helpful to have a notetaker who captures action items. Find a place where your team keeps running notes and action items to reference in the future.
• Include time for discussions that will lead to clear group decision-making. An example could be a discussion that leads to a vote on new products to incorporate into the line.

In the first series of gatherings and conversations, the program manager will primarily facilitate. In those meetings, they will guide participants as they design the cornerstones of their company and transition their perception of themselves from participants to staff. You can use these initial meetings to establish the following:

Community Agreements: These agreements are the group and individual expectations made clear and public. Setting expectations in this way is an important part of building your partnership with youth and establishing trust. Developing Community Agreements as a group is critical to fostering a safe space for young people to share their ideas. The Community Agreements our youth have set for each other always include elements of respect, trust, responsibility, accountability, and fun. Community Agreements can help create and define the company culture, as well as expectations of individuals, the team, and surrounding partners.
To create Community Agreements, the program manager can capture ideas that the group brainstorms on a whiteboard or large piece of poster paper during the initial meeting. Prompting questions can help lead the conversation. Some questions to consider:

- How do we want to show up as a group and as individuals when we are getting ready to work together?
- What is the best way for members of the group to communicate with each other? How can we show that we’re actively listening to one another?
- How can people hold themselves and each other accountable?
- How will we make decisions? What decisions can we make by a majority vote? Are there any topics that may need unanimous consent?
- What are ways that we can make our space feel fun and inviting to all? How can we be intentional about the way we talk, act, and decorate in order to be welcoming?
- Is there a special name or tagline that we want for our Community Agreements?

Community Agreement:

Although each group will have its own Community Agreements that reflect the group’s values and culture, we have found some concepts are universal.

We practice...

- Respect by celebrating our unique identities and superpowers, and by showing gratitude for our gardens and the creatures in them.
- Trust by believing that everyone is coming to work with the best intentions for each other and the team.
- Responsibility by using our collective pride for the business to encourage individual accountability in order to be present, passionate, productive, and professional.
- Having fun by cultivating a safe space to laugh, play, and just breathe because that is when we are most creative.

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work: Helping everyone define roles and responsibilities will be an important part of building your business. Establishing roles is an easy way to cultivate feelings of ownership and responsibility, and rotating roles is an easy way to delegate work and allow for the youth to build out different skills. Youth can also choose to focus on a particular team, if there is a skill set they would like to develop. You, as the program manager, can create or support the creation of a shareable document that restates the expectations defined in the community agreements for each role.

See examples of two tools that Mighty Greens use to clearly outline expectations and roles for Youth Staff.
MIGHTY GREENS EXPECTATIONS

1) Be your Word: If you say you will be somewhere, whether it be a market, workday, day of product making or after school commitment, be there. This is your business; this is your job. Act professionally and arrive on time. If you are running late or cannot make it, you must be in touch. Text the group and keep us updated. Communication is key.

2) Respect: Respect all living things. We are a team; we work together to create our business. Please respect the Mighty Greens business that you are becoming a cooperative member of; this business has been around for five years. Respect each other, the people you are working with are your co-workers, we all have different strengths and need support in different ways. We only succeed when we all succeed, take time to think about the ways in which you can support each other. Harassment of any kind and/or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Respect our customers, they are loyal and interested in who you are. Finally, respect the plants, they are at the core of this work and without them we would not be here!

3) Pay Out: Your stipend will be distributed as outlined in the Mighty Greens rubric. Payment is determined by attendance, work product, participation and leadership.

4) Attire: Wear appropriate clothing to work, keep comfort and safety in mind. Remember that you are working outside, in the dirt, and that your clothing will get messy. During garden days you must wear closed toed shoes and prepare for the elements (rain, heat), don’t wear anything you don’t want to get dirty. If you are not wearing closed toed shoes during garden days you will not be allowed to work.

5) Language: Profanity and offensive language is not accepted. We speak to each other consciously, positively, and with respect. We are all here for a reason and all bring value to shared conversations. We are a bilingual business, please feel comfortable exploring new ways to communicate, how to ask for help, and try speaking in a new language!

6) Stay Engaged: We work hard and play hard. When you are working in the garden, preparing for CSA or market and making value added products we ask that you are focused and stay engaged. It is our job to motivate each other. It is important to us that the quality of our work is high, that our customers stay satisfied and that we can be proud of what we do.

7) Stay Safe: Drink water! Wear sunscreen. Use bug spray. Take care of yourself; if you are feeling dizzy or lightheaded listen to your body and take a break. If you need to use the bathroom, feel free. Use tools only once you have learned how to properly use them. Ask questions as they arise. Tie your shoes, have fun!
# MIGHTY GREENS PARTICIPATION RUBRIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance/ Punctuality</th>
<th>4 – Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>3 – Meets Expectations</th>
<th>2 – Approaching Expectations</th>
<th>1 – Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
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<td>PLATINUM</td>
<td>GOLD</td>
<td>SILVER</td>
<td>GREEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participates in 40+ hours of regularly scheduled after school programming with Mighty Greens</td>
<td>• Participates in 20–40 hours of regularly scheduled after school programming with Mighty Greens</td>
<td>• Participates in at least 20 hours of regularly scheduled after school programming with Mighty Greens</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Attends at least three out of school activities; product making day, market, workday, field trip</td>
<td>• Attends at least one out of school activity; product making day, market, workday, field trip</td>
<td>• Attends at least one out of school activity; product making day, market, workday, field trip</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Garden maintenance</td>
<td>• Follows instructions fully the first time they are given</td>
<td>• Adheres to all wardrobe and safety protocols at all times</td>
<td>• Adheres to all wardrobe and safety protocols at all times</td>
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<td>• Cooking</td>
<td>• Shows exceptional care attention to detail</td>
<td>• Demonstrates deep understanding of course content and skills</td>
<td>• Demonstrates deep understanding of course content and skills</td>
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<td>• Value-added products</td>
<td>• Uses positive, solution-oriented language at all times</td>
<td>• Advocates for personal needs respectfully</td>
<td>• Advocates for personal needs respectfully</td>
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<td>• Harvest/prep CSA</td>
<td>• Displays active, thoughtful participation in discussions, team meetings, and tasks</td>
<td>• Participates actively in all scheduled tasks</td>
<td>• Participates actively in all scheduled tasks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Seedling care</td>
<td>• Collaborates with teammates to improve or develop new products</td>
<td>• Consistently takes risks and attempts new skills</td>
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<td>• Saturday markets</td>
<td>• Collaborates with teammates to improve or develop new products</td>
<td>• Actively recruits/welcomes new students/staff into the space</td>
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<td>• Workdays</td>
<td>• Takes initiative to complete additional tasks and solve problems</td>
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<td>• New products</td>
<td>• Takes on additional multiple responsibilities outside of scheduled class time</td>
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<td>• New foods</td>
<td>• Uses positive, solution-oriented language at all times</td>
<td>• Advocates for personal needs respectfully</td>
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<td>• Displays active, thoughtful participation in discussions, team meetings, and tasks</td>
<td>• Uses positive, solution-oriented language at all times</td>
<td>• Advocates for personal needs respectfully</td>
<td>• Advocates for personal needs respectfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaborates with teammates to improve or develop new products</td>
<td>• Consistently takes risks and attempts new skills</td>
<td>• Actively recruits/welcomes new students/staff into the space</td>
<td>• Actively recruits/welcomes new students/staff into the space</td>
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<tr>
<th>Leadership/Innovation</th>
<th>4 – Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>3 – Meets Expectations</th>
<th>2 – Approaching Expectations</th>
<th>1 – Does Not Meet Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PLATINUM</td>
<td>GOLD</td>
<td>SILVER</td>
<td>GREEN</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Takes initiative to complete additional tasks and solve problems</td>
<td>• Takes on additional multiple responsibilities outside of scheduled class time</td>
<td>• Collaborates with teammates to improve or develop new products</td>
<td>• Actively recruits/welcomes new students/staff into the space</td>
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<td>• Consistently takes risks and attempts new skills</td>
<td>• Actively recruits/welcomes new students/staff into the space</td>
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</table>

**EXPECTED PAYOUT (subject to change)**

- **$100**
- **$75**
- **$50**
- **n/a**

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## Mighty Greens Youth Staff Roles Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Name</th>
<th>Description of Tasks</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Insta-Garden Team          | • Create a list of goals for social media outreach/expansion and benchmarks for meeting goals  
                                 • Create and carry out a social media plan including but not limited to Instagram posts, Insta-Garden stories, Mighty Greens newsletter, Facebook event pages |
| Creative Expression Team   | • Design and create either one larger (or two smaller) art pieces to be displayed in one or both gardens/greenhouses  
                                 • Use materials found in the City Blossoms Studio, if additional materials are needed a supply list and budget must be submitted for consideration |
| Business Bloomers Team     | • Create a list of all items needed for market  
                                 • Create a list of all items that need to be bought in preparation for market  
                                 • Bi-weekly, pack up all market items in preparation and communicate what needs to be replenished/bought to supervisor |
| Community Roots Team       | • Connect with all workshop and field-trip leaders  
                                 • Create a resource of compiled contact information from field trips and workshops held this summer; include name, title, organization, contact information, and any other relevant details  
                                 • Research and compile other resources that might be useful for graduated participants in the intensive YEC summer program. Ex: Organizations that help with taxes, college app prep, mental health resources, volunteer hours opportunities, etc. |
| Mighty Memories Team       | • Create a burning question to ask all team members in order to capture the impact that this work has  
                                 • Design and carry out a creative way to compile all participant stories and burning-question answers that can be featured on Instagram page and website  
                                 • Evaluate the impact that program and participants have on one another, present this impact at the final staff meeting |

## Power Skills

- Entrepreneurship  
- Identity Development  
- Social Impact ° Community Responsibility  
- Creativity

Youth staff show off their newly finished signs for Cardozo Education Campus Garden.
Mission and Goal Setting:
Once the Community Agreements are set and everyone is ready to begin working together, it’s time to figure out the WHY?

Why is this group coming together to create a company versus working for one that already exists? What does this team think it can create that will enhance the community? Can this be a business that helps others thrive? It’s time to write a mission statement. A mission statement defines the business’ reason for existing and gives a sneak-peek into its values and goals.

Many companies have mission statements. An easy way to see this tool in action is to do some online research with your group. Check out mission statements that other companies or organizations use, and talk about what might make them effective.

Mission statements are typically one sentence, straight to the point, easy to remember, and exciting. After discussing what makes a good mission statement, it’s time to try making your own. Just like with the Community Agreements, make time for brainstorming, editing, and more editing, until the team has one to three statements everyone feels good about. Then, put the statements to the test. Do they:

- Explain WHY this company exists?
- Identify a way that the company will better the community?
- Feel welcoming, inclusive, and open to all?
- Make sense to people outside of the team?

To clarify the mission, it can be helpful for youth to add a few goals. More than two but less than six is a good range—three feels like a magic number. Goals articulate how the team will accomplish the mission in more detail. Goals also help youth picture what things will look like in their day-to-day work, and clarify how to explain to others exactly what they are doing in their company. Finally, the mission and the goals will help the team decide whether to say yes or no to new and exciting opportunities as they arise.

LESSONS LEARNED
Youth Staff created Mighty Greens to address an imbalance in access to health and nature, based primarily on people’s wealth, race, and geography. Youth Staff identified problems like not having access to diverse and affordable grocery stores, difficulty finding quality jobs, and lack of opportunity to practice financial management and freedom. Although these topics were not necessarily students’ top priorities when they started the program, through discussion, they were able to identify how they and their families were negatively impacted in one or more of these areas, and they got excited by the idea that they could be problem-solvers while making their own money. Through this discussion, a mission took form:

Mighty Greens is a year-round, youth-led cooperative that improves access to healthy foods in our communities.

They then added some goals to the mission statement:

- Goal #1: to grow, sell, and donate fresh food to our communities using sustainable and organic practices
- Goal #2: to promote food justice and learning
- Goal #3: to learn and apply business and life skills

Now that the Community Agreements (the guide), a Mission Statement (the purpose), and Goals (the objectives) are written out and agreed upon, it’s easy to stick them in a drawer and forget about them—adults do this all the time. But how can these important guiding messages really become the cornerstone of the new company’s culture? Celebrate them!

Your next step is to work with youth to make, frame, and prominently display these guiding statements in a creative way. An artistic poster that captures the mission can be a point of pride for youth. It also serves as a reminder that everyone can collectively or independently reference on a regular basis. Creative expression helps engrain these principles in the team while celebrating the work it took to put the ideas together. Finally, it helps new members, visitors, and patrons to quickly understand, respect, and participate in the environment that your group has created. You can take this exercise one step further. Once the posters are done and installed, why not take an initial group “founders” photo with them to mark the beginning of this new venture?
EXAMPLE EXERCISE
Establishing a Company
Expected number of sessions: 4-5

Session One:
• Introduce staff meetings and establish the way that you run them.
• Introduce meeting agendas, community agreements, mission statements, and goals.
• Collectively create and draft the Community Agreements.

Session Two:
• The Program Manager co-facilitates the staff meeting with a Youth Staff member.
• Revisit, edit, and finalize the Community Agreements.
• Draft a mission statement and goals.

Session Three:
• Break into small teams and survey “the public” on their thoughts about the clarity of the mission statement and goals.
• Come back, report, and finalize statements.

Session Four:
• Make a colorful poster for each set of statements.
• Decide where and how you will display the posters in the workroom.
• Take the founders’ photo!

POWER SKILLS
• Creativity
• Leadership
• Collaboration
• Communication
• Empathy
• Personnel Management

COMPOSING A BUSINESS PLAN
Identifying Products or Services: For this business to function and begin to make a profit, it needs to offer either goods or services. Goods are products that you package and sell to a customer. Services are agreed-upon actions or activities that benefit the client. This is one of the areas in which youth really get to flex their creativity in fun and visible ways. However, it is always helpful if the program manager has done some preliminary research in order to create the boundaries within which brainstorming can occur.

Here are some questions to answer for yourself before holding a product and/or service design meeting:
• SEED MONEY: How much start-up funding is there for the group? Do you have $100, $500, or $1,000 to get all the preliminary supplies that are needed?
• SPACE: What facilities, land, or resources are available to be used, possibly for several years?
• STORAGE: How much space is there to store supplies, tools, and inventory?
• SAFETY: What safety guidelines do you need to follow? For example, if the company is going to be offering landscaping services, is it okay to drive underage youth to the necessary locations? If you are making and packaging food, are there food safety laws that you need to observe?
• CLIENTS: What potential markets are readily available and supportive? Are there school fairs, farm stands, or organizational donors readily available and able to ensure some first successes for the start-up company?

Youth staff transplant seedlings.
**Product Design Meeting:** Once a program manager has created the frame in which product development can happen, it’s time to brainstorm. There are all kinds of ways to approach a product design meeting. Options can include bringing example items from home, visiting a grocery store for market research, or exploring online shops. Groups should be encouraged to work together or in smaller teams to list, draw, and discuss ideas that get them excited to explore. Often this is a very new concept. We are all used to being consumers first and so it can be a little tricky, but very powerful, to flip the script and think about how to be a producer.

Brainstorming should be loose and fun with no pressure yet to edit or even be completely realistic, but, just in case, here are some prompt questions that may help get the creative juices flowing:

1. What would you be excited to make and sell for a long period of time?
2. What do you think our potential customers (Grandma, your neighbor, a teacher, your bestie) would be interested in purchasing, over and over again?
3. What can we make or achieve in the time that we have to work together?
4. What can we expand into other products or services down the road?
5. How does this potential product connect back to the group’s mission and goals?
6. How does this potential product help our community and environment?

Share out the ideas and begin to discuss each one. Ask yourselves questions. Are you looking for one product or service (e.g. herb seasoning) that can be varied or a line of products (e.g. body care items) that fit under the company’s brand? Facilitate a group discussion that realistically frames the ability to accomplish potential goals. Begin to introduce concepts like manufacturing costs, access to supplies, time, and labor. This brainstorming process may take several meetings. Youth can independently research how to make the products they are interested in, or seek out other companies that sell similar goods or services. Through this facilitated conversation, you can edit out ideas until there are a few strong candidates to consider more closely.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

In 2017, the Mighty Greens Youth Staff decided they were interested in adding a line of teas to their products. This idea emerged from the youth’s interest in growing and drying a large number of herbs in their gardens. A group of youth attended a workshop with a small business, where they learned about how to produce, price, market, and sell a line of teas. Youth Staff then did more research on the herbs they were growing, experimented with a variety of mixtures, and came up with five tea blends.

**Figure Out Pricing:** Now that you have some products or services that your team is excited about, it’s time to figure out if those products or services are going to make money and what to do with that money. This is when their fun brainstorming starts to become real. It is also an easy place to let the excitement derail the conversation. It is the program manager’s job to find that balance between building enthusiasm and exploring big ideas while also editing those big ideas down to practical steps that are within your ability to support. Here are some questions you might want to consider:

- What is the price per service or product?
- What prices are other companies giving similar products or services?
- Is the difference between the cost of production and the selling point large enough that it’s worth the work? This is called a profit margin!
- How long does production take?
Using a table like the one below can support young entrepreneurs when they are making the final decision about what products and services make sense for now, and what should wait for future exploration. Since this is a “business on training wheels,” it’s okay if it takes time to figure this out. If the exercise provides space for a learning opportunity, then it’s worth the effort!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Name</th>
<th>Cost to make product—or expenses of raw materials per product</th>
<th>Time input—how much time does it take to make each product</th>
<th>Opinions on sellability</th>
<th>How much can the product sell for?</th>
<th>Gross Profit—the selling price minus the cost to make the product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Sunflower bouquet</td>
<td>Seeds—$27 (per 5,000 seeds) Twine—$6 (per roll) Cost per product—less than $1</td>
<td>10 minutes to construct each bouquet</td>
<td>High, but only available in the summer/fall</td>
<td>$10—depending on size of bouquet</td>
<td>$9.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Make time for testing! Innovation and testing are the most fun aspects of creating a youth-led business. Whether you decide your business is going to be providing landscaping for schools, reselling bulbs, making value-added products, or selling products directly, the team needs to have time to test each product or service without high stakes. Test your product or service by offering it at a low cost or no cost and getting feedback.

If you have read this far and realize that your group may not be ready yet to do all this, explore how to make a mini version of this into a unit of lessons that have a clear start and end with some sort of sale event. This can give everyone a first peek without a lot of investment—just like a lemonade stand.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Mighty Greens tested their glycerine-based, herb-infused soaps many, many times. They needed to determine what ratio of herbs was best, what smells their customers would like, at what size to construct the soap, and what molds were the easiest to use. After experimenting with different versions, the youth took testers of each version home and shared it with family and friends. The feedback from their community was incorporated into several iterations of their soap line until they settled on a recipe for their final product line.

Before City Blossoms fully developed the Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative program and before Mighty Greens was born, we did smaller seasonal entrepreneurial projects. This allowed both youth and City Blossoms staff the opportunity to explore what a project like this looked like, the chance to experiment, and the ability to learn on a manageable scale. Youth at Eastern Senior High School started to grow seedlings and have a plant sale for Mother’s Day before they had even established the name of their company. As the program became more fully established, their one-time plant sale developed into a larger, more robust annual seedling sale with multiple markets.
CRAFTING A BRAND

Creating the Face of the Company: Your team is strong, you have a plan for implementing your business, and everyone is excited about their products! Now, it’s time to come up with a name and a brand. Your brand should be inclusive and flexible, it should be something that is completely cooperatively decided in order to create buy-in and to have it accurately represent your youth community.

- **Company Name:** Coming up with a name is no small effort. Start by finding examples of company names that youth like and use those in their brainstorming sessions. Ask youths to throw out words that they feel define them. Write those words on sticky notes and post them all over the wall so youth can move them around like word art. You want to create a name that is catchy, playful, and reflects the group’s mission and participants. At the same time, you want the name to be vague enough that the company can grow into it if they want to change products down the road. Overall, you want something short and sweet, with the understanding that the name should be consistent as long as possible to help build the brand.

- **Logo:** Similar to your company name, the logo should be catchy, sweet, simple, and elegant (edit down, edit down, edit down!). Creating the logo is a great way to engage the youth’s creativity. Youth can start with sketches. Finding someone who can use design programs to transition the logo from a hand-drawn draft to a digital product will be an important step so that you can manipulate it easily. Additionally, creating an image that can shrink, grow, and print easily is crucial.

- **Colors:** Choose two to four colors that are part of your logo. These will become part of your business’s color palette for tabling, packaging, etc. You’ll see these colors a lot so make sure that you like them!

- **Packaging & Advertising:** The easiest way for this company-on-training-wheels to develop a professional look is to make sure that thoughtful time goes into making the packaging. The packaging is what takes their business from “that’s cute” to “oh! I didn’t realize that it was a youth-run company.” That transition allows you to charge the big bucks. It doesn’t have to be fancy or expensive, but finding labels and packaging that are consistent and professional-looking will be a big step in building the business.

- **Social Media:** You can’t have a modern brand without a variety of social media accounts. First thing’s first, though: discuss the safety of using photos on social media. What do playful, professional, and appropriate photos that reflect the youth and the company look like? To start off, pick one form of social media to use before expanding to others. Social media is important to the company for creating the brand, establishing a presence. Social media posts are digital flyers that let people know what you’re offering. If there’s a policy against using social media, see if your organization’s website or your school’s newsletter can dedicate space to sharing photos and information about events.

- **Side Note:** You will have to think about photo permission forms and make sure that everyone whose photo is posted has given consent (if they are under 18 this means getting consent from parents).
• **Swag:** A little bit of swag goes a long way. Gear builds community, makes everyone happy, and continues to build the brand and the customer base. You don’t need a lot of different types of swag and you don’t want to produce a lot of unnecessary trash, but finding the right swag for your team will help show pride in the work. Having some swag that youth can wear and some that can be shared with customers will go a long way in building the brand. Swag can be anything from t-shirts to buttons to stickers.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Mighty Greens Youth Staff re-branded in the summer of 2017. During this re-brand, they created a style guide that laid out guidelines for font, colors, and logo use in order to maintain consistency and to build the brand. Mighty Greens’ logo is on t-shirts, labels, stickers, and their social media posts.

**EXAMPLE EXERCISE**

Creating the Face of the Company

**Session One:**
Research examples of names and logos with elements that youth like.

**Session Two:**
Draft names and logos for the company that reflect the youth and the mission.

**Session Three:**
Determine name and color palette for the company. Create a digital version of the logo.

**MANAGING FINANCES**

Managing the Money: You have your mission, product line, brand, and a team that’s ready to go. Now, it’s time to dive a little deeper into making money, managing finances and profit-sharing. How you manage your finances will depend on what your school or organization has capacity for, but this section outlines some of the key components you might want to consider. Read this before your first dollar is made!

• **Startup Money:** If possible, through a grant or some other source, support the youth with an initial investment in their business. This is the seed money that can be used to get the business off the ground before they start making their own money. If this is not possible, what resources are available for free that youth can use to start their business? For example, many seed companies are happy to donate seed packets that are a year old.

• **Where Does the Money Go:** Start thinking about how the business will keep its cash. If the money that the program makes lives in your organization’s checking account, how will you keep track of the money that the youth-led business makes vs. the organization’s money? Does your school have a way of organizing funds raised by clubs or youth groups? You can consider a separate checking account where the youth keep their business money. The account should be opened under a legal entity’s name. For example, City Blossoms opened a separate checking account for the money that Mighty Greens earns. This has turned out to be a useful learning
tool as the Program Manager can review bank account statements with youth. Whichever option you choose, also consider how youth are playing a role in keeping track of their money and whether they are getting the opportunity to learn about managing money.

- **Who Pays for What:** Chances are the youth-led business will not be able to pay for all the expenses, as the point of their business is to create an engaging experience, not necessarily a profit-generating machine. This will be especially true when they’re just getting started. Clearly defining what materials or costs the school or organization covers versus what expenses the youth’s business is responsible for is essential. This will help the youth understand what expenses they will have to worry about and will help them make informed decisions about their money. Your organization or school may, for example, be responsible for the cost of essential program supplies such as art materials, the program manager’s time, and any key programmatic needs. Youth may be responsible for any non-essential programmatic supplies that can be considered a business cost such as T-shirts or water bottles with their logo on them. These items may help to enhance the business’ brand, but are not necessarily key to the youth creating a safe space to run their business. It’s important for the business to have expenses so that youth have the opportunity to practice budgeting, making spending decisions, and managing cash flow.

- **Business Meetings and Talking Money:** You already have regular meetings with a set time. The next step is to regularly schedule agenda items that focus on the company’s finances, budgeting, and sales. The frequency and structure of these finance-focused meetings is going to depend on what works best for your business, but consider making “talking money” a regular agenda item. You may also want to create clear start and end dates for when you do a big-picture review of your finances. See Appendix B for sample Mighty Greens budget.

- **Reinvest in the Company:** Like any company, in order for your youth-led business to continue to exist and provide services or products, you need to reinvest some of the profits. You should collectively decide on a reasonable percentage of the profits that youth feel comfortable reinvesting so that there is a clear expectation and transparency about how you’re distributing money. Mighty Greens youth reinvest 20% of their annual profits back into the business. This reinvestment is the money that youth then use to buy things that continue to build their business, e.g. swag or supplies that are key to manufacturing their products or providing their service.

- **Paying Youth:** Giving youth any amount of money comes with responsibility. It is essential that you figure out how to pay young people in a way that works for them, their families, and your organization. Be prepared to have conversations around financial safety, provide tools around financial literacy, and consistently communicate with parents, guardians, and youth about each step of the process.

- **Map Out Possible Hurdles:** Hurdles to paying young people are going to vary depending on your community. There can be a lot of things to consider before handing cash to young people. Do you work with youth from unbanked families? Are any of the youth undocumented? Do any of the youth or their families depend on quick loans? Communicating with youth and their families is absolutely essential. A letter or a phone call to parents should include expectations around the amount of income that they can expect, when they can expect it, and what form it will take (cash, check, electronic funds transfer, etc.). Since many of the youth may be under 18, any of the money they make may also impact the taxes of adults who claim them as dependents. Regularly providing information on pay-outs in addition to helpful resources will create transparency and support around the money that youth make. There are also often nonprofit, community-based organizations who provide free tax clinics.

- **Invest in Financial Literacy:** During your time with youth, financial literacy education should include the basics of saving money, opening a checking account, balancing a checkbook, cybersecurity of their account information, filing their taxes, and creating a personal budget. There are a lot of resources available online and often from local organizations as well. Check out who in your community supports financial literacy and see if it’s possible to connect youth with a nearby expert.
• **Develop a Schedule:** When will you pay the youth? What is best for your organization? How often can you manage to figure out how much money each youth made, write checks, and distribute those checks? These are all things to consider before paying youth.

• **How To Pay Youth:** We do not recommend handing young people a handful of cash, but maybe that’s what’s best for your students. Cash is easy to spend quickly and walking around with a lot of cash can be a safety hazard. Prepaid debit cards come with fees but are a good alternative. Electronic transfer tools such as Venmo, Paypal, or Cash App are also good options if you are working with students who have bank accounts. Paper checks provide an easy paper trail and can be transferred to a youth’s family member if necessary. Whatever you do, make sure to keep a detailed record of the exchange. For example, if you decide to write paper checks, keep an account of the check number, the youth’s name, the date it was written, and the amount. Be prepared to void the check if it gets lost or stolen. Decide up front if you will be willing to transfer the money to someone else if the youth asks you to.

• **How Much Moolah:** Youth should cooperatively decide on the expectations around profit-sharing. This is an essential part of the Community Agreements. Are youth compensated for the amount of hours that they put into the business, or will youth all get paid an equal slice of the profit pie? It’s completely up to them! But whatever you decide, consistently and clearly communicate how much money the business made and how much money each youth will receive.

• **Paperwork for Organizations:** If you are an organization handing out checks to students, they should be considered contractors who fill out a W-9 and receive a 1099 from your organization. Because the youth’s business is a “business on training wheels,” and it is not its own entity, it cannot write checks or distribute 1099s.

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### LESSONS LEARNED

Mighty Greens Youth Staff pay themselves based on the number of hours each person puts into the program. They collectively calculate their profits at the end of each season and divide that amount by the total working hours the collective put into the program. The amount is their wage per hour. See page 31 for the rubric they use.

Side Note: Many school systems require high school students to complete a certain number of community service hours to graduate. If this is the case at your school, offering community service hours for youth’s time is something to consider. This may also be a good way to get more youth involved.

**Making the Money:** Now that you know where the money goes, how will you make it? The type of markets or sales that youth choose to sell at will depend on the type of product or service that your business offers. Finding the right venue contributes to the youth’s image as valuable vendors. You might want to consider trying one to two venues at a time as the youth build their business and learn which types of venues are the best fit.

Youth staff discuss prices before market.
• **School sales:** Does your school have any annual sales or events where you could sell? School sales may be a good place to start since it will be easy to coordinate getting to the sale and all of the products will already be on-site. If it is a sale that recurs every year, your customer base will soon expect to see you there.

• **Nearby markets:** What kind of markets exist in your area? Depending on what product or service your business offers, craft or farmers markets might be a great place for youth to expand their customer base. It is also a great opportunity to network with other entrepreneurs in the area and get ideas about what other people are doing well. Markets typically have a fee associated with them, but sometimes they will waive it for youth groups, especially if you’re just getting started.

• **Recurring community events:** Does your community have any annual festivals or events where people sell things? Any event that is recurring and has a larger network of people who attend will help make outreach easier. It will also be a great opportunity to expand the number of people who learn about the business.

• **Holiday markets:** Do you provide a product or service that might be a good gift around the holidays? If so, holiday markets may be a great opportunity for youth to sell a little extra as people look for gifts for friends and family.

• **Contracts:** Once you’ve had a chance to really establish the program and can manage larger orders, contracts could be a good way to expand your business. Setting up a contract can provide the opportunity to hone really useful skills and make a set amount of money without having to spend as much time at a market, where you might not know how much you will actually sell. As with any new undertaking, start with small contracts and make sure that they’re a good fit for their business. Keep the business’s production rate in mind when assessing the feasibility of potential contracts.

• **Online sales:** Once the business is established, online sales might be another route to consider. Online sales will probably mean you have to navigate shipping your products, so wait until you feel ready to take this on.

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**LESSONS LEARNED**

Mighty Greens sell seedlings, produce, and products in the following ways: through community pop-up sales, at various farmers markets, in CSAs at their schools, during holiday markets, and through small contracts with other community-based organizations.

**POWER SKILLS**

• Entrepreneurship
• Leadership
• Organizing
• Competence + Self Efficacy
EXAMPLE EXERCISE

**Market Training**
Before diving into the real thing, taking time to practice how to talk to customers at markets is a good way to make sure everyone’s prepared. Here are a few things to cover in a role play before your first market:

- Pitch: who we are, what we do, where we do it, how long we’ve been doing it and why we do what we do
- Mission: know the company mission to share what you’re all about
- Goals: know the company goals
- Selling points: what are three points to stress to the customer about your products?
- Frequently asked questions: practice answering questions that customers might ask
- Know the product: how’s it made or used?
- Roles: who’s doing what?
- Work together: emphasize having fun with the customers and helping each other out when things get busy

Collecting Cash and Making Sales: This is a great opportunity for youth to practice handling money and talking to customers. A proper cash box with slots for bills and coins is your friend at a farmers market when youth are quickly trying to make change and keep their stand organized. Since you’ve already set up a separate bank account for the youth’s funds, you could also use Venmo, Cash App, PayPal, or a Square card reader, teaching the youth non cash methods of payment.

**POWER SKILLS**
- Financial Literacy
- Community Responsibility
- Mathematical Thinking
- Resource Management

EXAMPLE EXERCISE

**Making a Business Plan**
A business plan is different from a Community Agreement because it outlines the goals and further defines the mission of the business instead of focusing on the culture and values of the company. The business plan should identify partnerships, activities, resources, examine customer relations, markets and figure out how the company is making money. The business plan should be revisited and updated annually as youth cycle through the program. At this point, you have all the working pieces you need for a business plan, and putting all of those pieces into one document or creative display with youth is a fun activity.

Components of a business plan:
- Key Partnerships: other businesses or services you’ll work with to run your business
- Key Activities: ways your business will gain a competitive advantage
- Key Resources: any resource you’ll leverage to create value for your customer
- Value Propositions: clear and compelling statement about the unique value that your company brings to the market
- Customer Relationships: how customers will interact with your business
- Target Markets: have a clear sense of who your business will serve
- Revenue Streams: how your company will actually make money
- Channels: most important ways that you’ll talk to your customers
**KEY CONCEPTS**

*Building That Youth-led Start-up*

**Establishing the Company**
- Establish the meeting times, activities, and expectations that work for youth and their business.
- What does creating safe space look like for your company culture?
- What is the youth’s business all about?
- What is the why?

**Composing a Business Plan**
- What is your business selling? Consider the bounds of money, space, potential markets, and any other key factors that may impact what you can do.
- After all of your team’s creative brainstorming, how are you going to edit down to the goods and/or services that feel like the best fit?
- You have products or services that your team agrees on—now what do they cost?

**Crafting a Brand**
- Start developing your company name, logo and brand.
- What do your team’s roles and responsibilities look like?

**Managing Finances**
- Where does the money go?
- How do you manage the money?
- How do you pay youth in the best way for them, their families, and your organization?
- Where and how are you selling your products and services?

Youth staff promote their products through enticing displays.
DESIGNING A GREEN SPACE AND PLANTING PLAN

An important step in developing a garden-based business with youth is designing the green space where it all happens. Whether you’re starting from scratch or working with an existing green space, thinking through what the youth and community need and want is key in creating a space that works for everyone.
WHEN DESIGNING YOUR GREEN SPACE, THESE QUESTIONS MIGHT HELP THE YOUTH ENVISION WHAT WORKS BEST FOR THEM:

- Where is there enough space to create a garden that will accommodate the number of youth that want to participate? Does the space have access to water? What about sunlight?
- What do you want from your garden? Should it be a production garden? A place to display art? A place for quiet and meditation? How will it fit into the school/organization’s culture?
- What will be the primary and secondary purpose of this garden? Who will use the space? If the main purpose of the green space is to support the youth’s green business, how are you connecting with other classes, after-school clubs, and school staff? Connection to the greater school community will help with outreach, where more people are invested in the care of the garden. More investment will increase the longevity of your garden and green business.
- Who will be responsible for and care for the space? Are youth able to care for the space and run their business? Who else is able to help keep this garden thriving?
- What challenges do you foresee? Where do you need support?
- Identify your cheerleaders! Who are the partners (organizations, individuals, volunteer groups) that you can invite to help build and activate the garden?
- How will the garden support or enrich the local ecosystem?
- If your garden concept is really big, how could you break it into phases? This gives you the opportunity to refine your vision as it takes shape, and gives you the chance to fundraise as needed along the way.
- What are the costs associated with the design? Is the plan financially appropriate and sustainable over multiple years? Who will manage the funds, and how will they do so?

Once you have a vision, outline what steps you’ll take in years one, two, three, and beyond.

**Mapping:** Measure out your future garden site and break into small groups so that youth can draw out their ideal garden. They should try to incorporate ideas generated from the guiding questions above and make sure to include a few basic elements such as pathways, a gathering area, signage, and anything that is key to the business.

**Dream Garden:** Enter the Dream Phase! During this part of planning, encourage youth to create maps that represent what they want out of the space. There are many ways to creatively co-design green spaces. You could think about using magazines to make a collage. Or break out a large box of colored pencils. Students can even create small dioramas. After the first draft, this is the time to look at how the space...
fits with the business plan. What kind of plants can you grow at the quantity and scale that will fit with your business plan? Your job as the program manager is to balance the dream plans with the projected resources, time constraints, and business plan. Have youth present ideas for the space to one another and discuss different design attributes. You can try voting on different elements and combining designs, or have a smaller design team that creates three to four options that incorporate a variety of ideas and then rank those options. This is another opportunity for youth to explore group decision-making and compromise.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Mighty Greens has access to two greenhouses as well as big outdoor growing areas that are a mix of vegetables, herbs, perennial plants, and annual flowers. Every winter, Youth Staff review the concepts behind crop rotation and discuss what crops they want to focus on for the upcoming spring. They then design a planting plan together. Youth Staff consider which crops were most successful for their business in previous years. They also choose at least one crop that is totally new to them, but that they are interested in learning more about.

**Stations:** Creating stations in the green space will help make the space easier to use in terms of group management, varied activities, and participant comfort. Clearly marked stations also make it so youth know where to find things and can easily jump into activities even if they do not attend programming on a regular basis. Having youth create colorful plant labels and large signs will illustrate the stations. Here’s a list of components and stations we have at City Blossoms gardens:

- **Sign-in area**—However you’re tracking participation, having a table or area that has information about the program and a place to sign in helps set a welcoming tone.
- **Diverse ecosystem**—What you plant will depend on your business and what your school community wants from this space. You may want to consider planting some variety of herbs, flowers, and vegetables to create a diverse ecosystem, and to provide variation in terms of learning opportunities.

- **Growing areas**—There are so many different ways to design gardens. As you design your space, consider what works best for you. You might want to incorporate in-ground plantings, raised beds, and containers. Raised beds typically cost more to construct, but they prevent soil compaction, promote good drainage, help control weeds, and may be a good way to help people with different physical abilities garden more comfortably. See Appendix C for more information on building raised beds. In-ground beds are another good option, but just be sure to test the soil that you’re growing in if you’re going to be producing anything edible.
- **Pathways**—Think about how people will move through the space. Is it clear where to walk and where not to? Do the pathways go somewhere? Creating clear pathways will help with the flow of your space and help visitors navigate it. Think about accessibility!
- **Storage**—Storage should always include clearly labeled containers for garden materials, product-making materials, business supplies, etc. Things can get messy fast!
- **Water & Washing Station**—Figure out how to make water access as easy as possible. Gardens need lots of water, so making this process as simple as possible is important. If you’re going to regularly need to wash produce, you may also want to consider a more established wash area. Even if you can’t create a more permanent area, try clearly labeling containers that are just for harvesting and washing produce rather than hand washing or rinsing tools.
- **Meeting & Gathering Area**—Sometimes we call this the outdoor classroom. It can be as simple as a few stumps placed in a circle or as fancy as a set of picnic tables. This is where you can hold business meetings and other large group activities.
- **Cooking & Eating Area**—This could be the same space as the gathering area, but maybe you want to eat at a more formal table, or somewhere that’s easier to keep clean.
- **Compost & Waste Area**—Having access to nearby trash should be prioritized from the get-go. Compost is also definitely worth considering if it fits within your budget and capacity because it can create further learning opportunities, help to minimize waste, and create nutrient-rich growing material. Compost can also take a lot of work, and you’ll want to make sure that you create a critter-proof system.
**Signage:** Creating signs with youth is a fun process that can easily boost the impact and effectiveness of the garden space. Refer to Chapter 1 and the section on “Creating an Intentional and Joyous Culture” for more information on art and signage as an important component of safe spaces. When youth are working on designing their signage, think about how the signs will connect with their branding and logo, if you have created it. To start out, ask yourselves these questions:

- Do youth want a particular shape for their signs? This may be dictated by tools available. At City Blossoms, we make signs with 3/4" CDX Plywood. We use a jigsaw to cut fun shapes out of the plywood and then smooth the edges with power sanders.
- What colors do you want to use for signage? Usually picking 2–3 main colors will help to lend a cohesive feeling to the garden signs. At City Blossoms, we always prime our plywood signs with an exterior acrylic primer. This makes them last longer!
- What type of art do youth want to incorporate into their space? How does this help set the tone of the garden? This may be another opportunity to collaborate with other students in art classes, or to invite a young person who is drawn to art to take a larger role in developing signage.

**Budget:** Create the initial garden build budget. Once youth have decided on a design for their space, you will need to create a budget for the garden and, depending on how large the space is, you can determine which design elements you want to prioritize. It might be helpful to break into smaller groups to research certain elements of the plan and then share your discoveries. This is where youth may have to make choices about what elements they adapt to save money or what pieces of the garden they will tackle later on.

**What to Plant:** Once youth have decided what they want to grow, the next step is creating your planting plan! Planting plans should reflect what your green business needs out of the space. If your team is just getting started with gardening, here are some things to consider and research a bit further: If the space is more focused on perennial plants, such as herbs and flowers, there will be less need to create a new planting plan every year. If you have a mix of perennials and annuals, youth will be able to make choices from year to year about what is in the garden. A mix also allows for youth to experiment with what types of plants they grow.

- **Perennials vs. annuals**—Perennials are plants that live for more than two years. Perennials will most likely be a bigger initial investment but will stick around for many years if you care for them. Annuals are plants that die after a season, so you need to replant them every year. Annuals create more space for flexibility from year to year since you can change what you plant where.

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**LESSONS LEARNED**

At one garden, Mighty Greens youth took pictures of one another and then printed their photos on engineering paper. They then wheat-pasted the photos onto the brick wall that surrounds the garden. As soon as you walk into the space, you’re greeted by images of the many Youth Staff who care for and run the garden. These photos typically stay up for 2–3 years and then get replaced by new faces that have filtered into Mighty Greens. This is a relatively cheap way to have student art in the garden and also to represent the Youth Staff who make up the business.
• **Planting zone**—Looking at the USDA Hardiness zone map will help you determine what growing zone you are in. North America is broken up into 11 growing zones that are based off of the average lowest winter temperature in your region. Your planting zone is going to help you figure out what plants will grow happily in your region.

**USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map**
planthardiness.ars.usda.gov

![USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map](planthardiness.ars.usda.gov)

**LEGEND**

- 1a: 0°F to 10°F (–18°C to –12°C)
- 1b: 10°F to 20°F (–12°C to –29°C)
- 2a: 20°F to 30°F (–6°C to –1°C)
- 2b: 30°F to 40°F (–0°C to 4°C)
- 3a: 40°F to 50°F (4°C to 10°C)
- 3b: 50°F to 60°F (10°C to 16°C)
- 4a: 60°F to 70°F (16°C to 21°C)
- 4b: 70°F to 80°F (21°C to 26°C)
- 5a: 80°F to 90°F (26°C to 32°C)
- 5b: 90°F to 100°F (32°C to 38°C)
- 6a: 100°F to 110°F (38°C to 43°C)
- 6b: 110°F to 120°F (43°C to 49°C)
- 7a: 120°F to 130°F (49°C to 54°C)
- 7b: 130°F to 140°F (54°C to 59°C)
- 8a: 140°F to 150°F (59°C to 66°C)
- 8b: 150°F to 160°F (66°C to 71°C)
- 9a: 160°F to 170°F (71°C to 77°C)
- 9b: 170°F to 180°F (77°C to 83°C)
- 10a: 180°F to 190°F (83°C to 91°C)

*Source: USDA Agricultural Research Service (2012)*

• **Flowers**—Even if you’ve decided to focus on selling vegetables, you probably want to consider including some flowers in your space. Most everyone likes seeing a pretty pop of color when they walk into a garden, and flowers are also a great way to encourage pollinators to visit your space. This will help any plants that depend on pollination from insects to produce fruit, like tomatoes and squash.

• **Native perennial plants**—Native perennial plants are plants that evolved to grow in your region, which means that they are adapted to thrive with your region’s climate and usually require less maintenance. In addition to needing less effort from your team, they will help to create habitat for birds and insects that are important to your garden ecosystem. Lastly, choosing and planting these plants can create some great learning opportunities. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Pollinator Partnership, National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, and the Native Plant Trust have digestible resources on native plants, and a database of native plants that you can search through based on your region, light requirements, soil moisture, bloom time, and more. These might be interesting resources to use when researching what to plant with the youth.

• **Vegetables**—Whether they are central to your business or not, planting some vegetables creates the opportunity to try food that you’ve grown together as a team. Consider growing enough vegetables for youth to be able to take home harvests, or enough for them to make a shared meal during programming. Vegetables often take a lot more work than perennial plants, so, depending on what summer looks like in your community, you can always decide to grow your vegetables in the spring and fall when there are more hands to support the garden.

• **Sunlight and water**—What parts of your space get the most and least sunlight is going to influence where you will plant things. The drainage in your space is also going to impact what grows well. For instance, if there are any natural low points in the garden that are significantly wetter than other areas, this might be a good spot for water-loving perennial flowers. If you have an area that gets regularly inundated with rain, you may want to look into developing a rain garden. A rain garden is a depression planted with native perennials and flowers that temporarily holds water after storms and helps to mitigate runoff.

• **Herbs**—Herbs are any plant that people use to flavor food, make scented products, or make medicine. Herbs include plants like basil, rosemary, lavender, thyme, oregano, etc. Herbs can be a great way to grow a lot of product to share, even if you don’t have access to a huge amount of space, because you don’t typically need enormous quantities of herbs to cook a meal. A little goes a long way.
EXAMPLE EXERCISE

Just like it’s important for youth voices to be central in shaping the business, it is key for youth and community to be a part of shaping a green space. You won’t build your garden overnight, so it might help to break the project into clear phases of construction. Once you have a plan, you can even post the stages outside of your garden or share them in a school newsletter so that everyone can have a sense of the process and timeline.

• Phase 1: Discuss what the youth and school community want and need from the garden.
• Phase 2: Walk through the would-be garden space and discuss different ideas for the space with youth. Make Dream Garden maps.
• Phase 3: Once your design starts to take shape, think through the stations in your space and make sure that they align with the business’s needs.
• Phase 4: Create a concept for signage that builds on the brand of the youth-led business, and that helps people navigate the space.
• Phase 5: Create a budget.
• Phase 6: Create opportunities for broader community feedback. Invite an art or woodshop class to engage with the space.
• Phase 7: Draft the finalized plan and post it somewhere for everyone to see.
• Phase 8: Set the date for the initial workday and spread the word.
• Phase 9: Host the community workday and end with a celebratory meal.
• Phase 10: Set the next workday date for subsequent construction phases, and establish recurring community workdays to support maintenance and to foster community connection to the garden.

GARDENING, GREENHOUSES, AND HOOP HOUSES, OH MY!

You do not have to be an expert gardener to do this work. Gardens are excellent places to experiment and learn together, and there are endless resources to support your team as you navigate growing your business and green space. Whether you’re feeling overwhelmed about all there is to learn, or you’re an experienced gardener looking to troubleshoot a particular problem, chances are that you can find someone to support the creation of this garden. These might be a few good options to keep in mind:

• Cooperative extension services—All 50 states, US Territories, and the District of Columbia have a cooperative extension service that is a resource for a wide range of garden and agriculture questions. These extension services often offer soil testing as well and are connected to Master Gardener programs, which offer an intensive gardening certification program for adults. As a part of the certification, Master Gardeners are required to complete a certain number of volunteer hours. Master Gardeners and Extension Agents may be a good resource for helping you get your garden started.
• Nearby experts—Seeking out support from nearby experts (such as your local botanic garden!) can be a great networking and learning opportunity for youth, and can save time when trying to better understand garden concepts. Try reaching out to your school stakeholders or community partners. Chances are there is a parent, teacher, neighbor, or partner who is knowledgeable and willing to support. Another way to seek out garden learning opportunities may be to look at farms in your area. Some farms offer field trips or volunteer opportunities. Local botanical gardens are another resource worth looking into for your area. Many botanical gardens have educational programs for students and educators.

• Use challenges as a learning opportunity—If something isn’t working, it’s a good opportunity to research, experiment, and figure out what would work better for your team and your region.

Garden Basics: How to Get Your Garden Started: You’ve designed, budgeted, and started building your garden—now it’s time to start growing! If you’re just getting started, here are a few basics you and your team might want to explore:

• Soil—What’s your soil like? Sandy, heavy clay, or loamy? Check in with the cooperative extension service in your state to get tips on whether you need to amend your soil, which means adding to it to make it more suitable for growing. The cooperative extension service can also help you figure out whether it’s worth getting a soil test. Soil tests are important for a number of reasons. If you are in an urban area, it is critical that you test the soil if you plan to plant straight into the ground, rather than in a raised bed. It’s important because many cities have heavy metals, like lead, in their soil from industrial pollution.

• Growing zone—You can figure out what growing zone you’re in with a quick Google search. Zones help guide you in picking out crops and flowers that will grow well in your garden. Do you live in zone 4a, but your youth want to grow okra? That will be tough, and the okra seed packets will list the growing zone or “hardiness zone” to keep you informed about where the plant will thrive.

• Seeds versus seedlings—Some plants grow easily from seed, which means you can plant them directly into the ground and they’ll take off. Some of the time, it will be easier to plant from seedlings. Seedlings have had a cushy early life in a greenhouse, and have an established root structure, which will help them be successful in your garden.

• Planting—For annual, edible crops like tomatoes, lettuce, and squash, your planting plan should include WHEN to plant in addition to WHERE to plant. You and the youth can figure out that timing together by doing research on the types of plants you want to grow. This is also a great time to call in a Master Gardener or an elder in your community who has experience growing a garden. If you live somewhere with significant temperature changes during different seasons, it’s important to get your timing right so that crops have enough time to bear fruit. In Washington, D.C., for example, we try to get our tomatoes into the ground by late May so that they can produce fruit during the summer months.

• Crop rotation—Crop rotation is a strategy of growing annual crops. In a very simple crop rotation system that takes into consideration the major nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium—often called NPK), crops fall into four main categories: leaves, fruits, roots, or legumes. Leafy greens need a lot of nitrogen to make their stems and leaves so it’s best if they’re planted after legumes which fix nitrogen. Fruits such as tomatoes and peppers need a lot of phosphorus to create the flowers and fruit that we eat. If they have too much nitrogen then sometimes they have too much leaf growth and not enough fruit. Roots need the least amount of nitrogen, but depend on potassium, so they are last in the cycle before planting legumes again. Plant crops from these different groups in different parts of your garden and then rotate where those groups are planted each year. This helps maintain healthy soil and disrupts pest and disease cycles. There are many ways to approach crop rotation besides this method. If you’re just starting out, start with a simple plan and lean on experts in your community who can give advice.
• **Maintenance**—Weeding, watering, and harvesting are all things that require regular attention. The pattern with maintenance always is that our gardens always tend to look pristine in April and May, but then, by August and September, they start to look a little wild. That’s OK, and your garden does not have to be spick-and-span, but it helps to devote one to two days a week to maintenance, and to stick to that commitment. We also find that dividing the garden into sections and tackling one section at a time is a good way to maintain the space in a systematic way, especially if there are different groups of students caring for the space at different times.

• **Pests and diseases**—Pests and diseases are going to impact your plants no matter what color your thumb is. These challenges also present opportunities to research, experiment, and creatively address problems. Pest management is a chance to understand insect life cycles and explore preventative measures, and to experiment with plant varieties that are more pest-resistant. If you plan to address these challenges without the use of toxic chemicals, consider exploring Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for ways to care for your plants.

**Greenhouses:** In many regions across the U.S., the school year may not align well with the growing season. If you are working within a school community, this will be a challenge. A greenhouse might allow your business to grow for a longer portion of the school year, or it might make it possible to start seedlings for the spring. If you already have access to a greenhouse, there are so many ways that youth can incorporate it into their business. If you’re considering a greenhouse, it may be a good element to add to your space once you feel ready to take on additional financial and time commitments. For a more detailed introduction on greenhouses and how to incorporate them into your classroom, reference *Greenhouse Manual: An Introductory Guide for Educators* (National Center for Appropriate Technology, City Blossoms, and United States Botanic Garden, 2020).

**Hoop Houses & Season Extension:** If you don’t have access to a greenhouse but want to extend your season, hoop houses are a good, less expensive option. You could also consider other types of season extenders, such as cold frames. If you’re looking to experiment with extending your season without making a big financial or time commitment, cold frames are inexpensive to make and they can be a great construction project for youth to take on.

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**POWER SKILLS**

- Entrepreneurship
- Leadership
- Personal Management
- Collaboration
- Resource Management
- Competence + Self Efficacy

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Eastern Senior High School’s greenhouse set up with activity stations.

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Hoop house with garden
Growing Seedlings: If you have access to a hoop house or greenhouse, growing seedlings may be something you want to consider. If you want to try your hand at growing seedlings on a smaller scale, you can start with grow lights inside. Seedling care takes time and many hands, so think about what makes sense as a starting point for your team.

- **Grow to plant**—Growing seedlings to plant in your own garden helps you get to decide exactly which varieties to grow and saves you money.
- **Tracking seedling growth**—Whether you’re growing seedlings to sell or growing them for your own space, tracking seedling growth will be important to the health of your plants. It is also an excellent way to explore plant life cycles. Think about how your team will track seedling growth, and make sure your plants get the care they need.

- **Selling seedlings**—Depending on where you live, it can be hard to find local seedlings that are of suitable varieties for your region. If this is the case in your community, this may be a really great opportunity to engage with your neighborhood while making money. Often, people are particularly excited about working in their gardens in the spring, so growing and selling seedlings at that time of year might be a good place to start.

- **What to grow**—Try starting your research by looking through seed catalogs and determining which seedlings you would like to grow. From there, choose the varieties that make sense for your business, garden, and growing zones. Make sure to order your seeds early enough so that you get them in time for planting, and before your chosen varieties sell out.

### EXAMPLE EXERCISE

*Seedlings*

**Session One**—this may take place over several days/weeks

- Break into groups and have each group focus on different types of plants
- Use seed catalogues to determine what seedlings you want to grow
- Gather information on each variety: planting date, seed depth, days to germination, transplanting, and how many days until harvest
- Share out on different growing options

**Session Two**

- Vote on which plants and varieties you want to grow this year
- Decide what materials and seeds you need to order
- Map out what needs to get planted and when
- Order seedling materials

**Session Three**

- Organize materials and review planting process
- Create a system for how you’re going to label and track your seedling process
- Create art and signage that illustrates these processes and serve as a reminder

**Session Four**

- Start planting!
LESSONS LEARNED
In the first few years of Mighty Greens, Youth Staff tried many different varieties of each vegetable that they grew in the spring. This allowed them to get a sense for which varieties worked well in their garden. After a few years, they decided to concentrate on a smaller number of varieties. Fewer varieties proved to be less overwhelming, and they were able to give the seedlings better care.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
You have your garden and your business plan, so now it’s time to further define your products. When you’re developing your products, your team of youth will probably want to include as much from the garden as possible to keep other expenses low. You can always start small, and then work your way up to eventually expanding your product line or using a commercial kitchen to produce more. Here are some things you might want to consider:

- **Value-added products**—Garden-based, value-added products allow your team to make a larger profit without producing crops at a large scale. Mighty Greens Youth Staff make teas, soaps, lotions, and much more. You can ship value-added products easily and they will last longer than fresh produce.
- **Shelf stability**—When you’re creating a product line, consider starting with products that do not need to be refrigerated and can stay on the shelf for at least a year. This will mean that you don’t have to have a plan for refrigeration. However, you will still want to think about where and how you are safely storing your products so that you can ensure quality for customers. Things like herbal teas, herb salts, and infused vinegars have been successful products for Mighty Greens that also have a long shelf life.
- **Food handling certification**—If your team is going to be making edible value-added products, you might want to consider going through some kind of food handlers course. In addition to further professionalizing your business and increasing production safety, this type of certification is a great resume-builder. These courses typically cost money, so it is something to include in your budget. Sometimes nearby colleges or universities will offer them at a discounted price.
- **Pricing**—The price of each product should balance profit with the accessibility of the goods. Will the prices youth have set be affordable for families, neighbors, and peers? Will the youth earn enough money to make the endeavor worthwhile? After you’ve answered these questions, try stepping back and thinking about how these prices compare to similar products sold elsewhere.

Selling chive blossom vinegar at farmers market.
EXAMPLE EXERCISE
Product Development

Session One: Figuring out the pricing, discussion questions
- What is the price per service or product?
- What price are other companies attaching to similar products or services?
- Is the difference between the cost of production and the selling point large enough that it's worth the work? This is called a profit margin!
- How long does the product take to make?

Session Two: Create a table that illustrates costs for each product
- What is the product?
- How much money did you spend on each unit? You can consider the raw materials from the garden as no-cost to help simplify your calculation. Therefore, the more raw materials you produce from the garden, the lower you can keep your final product per-item expense.
- How much time does it take to make each unit?
- Compare and contrast: Look at similar products—how much is each unit selling for?

Session Three: Look at the prices for all of your products and discuss if prices feel reasonable for peers, staff, families, neighbors etc.
- Would you buy this product? Ask friends or family if they think that they would buy this product for the price.
- Do these prices feel accessible to peers? If you’re worried that peers won’t be interested in your product for the price, are there any strategies to resolve this? Would you consider a student discount?
- Overall, do you have a product line that ranges in price?
- Based on these conversations, set your finalized prices.

LESSONS LEARNED
Mighty Greens Youth Staff have developed several product lines over the years. These have come about through experimentation and cooperative decision-making. Some of the products have become a huge success and other ideas have provided great learning opportunities. Several years ago, we had lots of catnip growing in our gardens. Mighty Greens decided to make handmade catnip toys with catnip harvested and dried from the garden. After several sessions of making very cute cloth fish and mice stuffed with catnip, they only had 15 toys to sell. This exploration led Youth Staff to discuss what products made sense for them in terms of time and how they could realistically price each item. Ultimately, they decided not to continue making catnip toys. Experiments like this lead to rich learning opportunities, interesting discussions, and group decisions for the business.

LESSONS LEARNED
Items Mighty Greens has offered in its history: seedlings, produce, bouquets food line: teas, popcorn, herb vinegar, herb seasonings, herbal lemonades, body care line: shea butter lotion bars and whipped body creams, lavender mini blankets, soaps, and catnip treats.
SELLING FROM THE GARDEN

If you decide to sell produce from the garden, you’ll want to think through safety measures and how you’re selling your produce. You’ll also want to make sure that your planting plan takes into account the following elements:

Safety: If you’re growing edible produce to share or sell, you’ll want to make sure that you’re taking measures to ensure food safety. There are a lot of resources available to help guide safe growing and harvesting practices. The USDA has resources specifically dedicated to ensuring the safety of produce grown in school gardens. Think about developing a garden checklist based on this, so that everyone has all the information they need to grow safe produce. For more ideas and tips on how to maintain garden safety refer to Growing Strong: A Comprehensive Guide to Support All School Garden Programs in the District (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, United States Botanic Garden, and City Blossoms, 2021). Here are some safety tips to consider:

- **Prevent contamination**—Make sure that you’ve tested your soil and use potable water, and make sure that you manage compost and waste properly. Keep an eye out for signs of rodents, animals, or other possible sources of contamination.
- **Harvest safety**—Make sure that anyone harvesting food is healthy, washes their hands before harvesting, and uses clean food grade-containers.
- **Washing produce**—Make sure that you wash produce in potable water and that you clean all containers regularly.
- **Storage**—Harvesting produce to sell on that same day may help you avoid some of the more complex storage processes. The USDA’s “Best Practices for Handling Fresh Produce in Schools” may be a good resource to look at if you do have to store produce before selling (U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.)

Where to sell: Depending on how much produce you’re trying to sell, you may want to explore a few different vending options. When you’re determining what works best for your team, consider timing, consistency, time-input versus profit, and how difficult it is to coordinate the transportation of produce and equipment to various locations. Here are a few things to consider.

- **School CSA**—Community Supported Agriculture, or CSAs, have become an increasingly popular way for people to get local produce and support nearby farms—kind of like a subscription to produce that is in season. Your youth’s business may want to consider this as an option to offer to customers in the spring and fall as a way to share produce with their school community and make money. A school CSA will definitely mean coordinating pick-up or delivery times, but this option could cut out the difficult logistics involved in going to another location. This is also a chance for youth to share all of their hard work with the greater school community.
- **Sidewalk sales**—You could also explore what it is like to sell produce in a central location at, or in front of, your school. If there is an area that gets a lot of foot traffic, this could be a good option. However, with a sale that has no guaranteed customer base, it can be more difficult to figure out how much produce to harvest and how to increase your profits.
- **Farmers markets**—Nearby farmers markets are another venue for selling garden produce. Going to another location always creates more work, but it may also create new opportunities to increase sales and broaden your customer base. When you’re selling at a farmers market, do some market research to make sure that your prices are in line with other stands that are selling similar produce. You’re probably competing with farmers who are depending on these sales to make a living, so you’ll want to take this into consideration when pricing your items.
KEY CONCEPTS
Growing a Garden-Based Business

Designing a Green Space and Planting Plan
- Making sure that your design is based on youth voice, community input, and is in line with your business plan is key.
- Creating a garden doesn’t happen overnight! Gathering input, mapping out your space, dreaming big, and considering key parameters like space, budget, and capacity are important steps in designing the space that’s right for your team.

Gardening, Greenhouses, and Hoop houses—Oh My!
- You do not need to be an expert gardener to do this work. Experimenting and learning is part of the experience. Seek out nearby experts who can help you grow.
- Getting started can be overwhelming, so consider starting small and taking on more once your team has a handle on the basics.
- As your business and program grows, greenhouses, hoop houses, season-extension tools, and seedlings may be interesting next steps for your team to explore.

Product Development
- As your team develops their product line, they might want to consider value-added products, shelf stability, food handling certification, and pricing.
- Don’t be afraid to start small and build up your product line over time.

Selling From the Garden
- If your team is going to sell produce from the garden, consider the measures that you’ll take in order to prevent contamination and store produce safely.
- Work with your team to decide where and how to sell produce in your community.
In this section, we provide a more detailed overview of Mighty Greens, the youth-led, garden-based cooperative business that developed out of City Blossoms’s Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative program. In using Mighty Greens examples throughout this guide, we hope to have illustrated what our youth-led business looks like and shared some of our lessons learned. Mighty Greens Youth Staff work within their school communities as a part of an after-school program. We have been lucky to have access to existing school greenhouses, first at Eastern Senior High School and later at Cardozo Education Campus. This existing infrastructure was the jumping-off point in developing a business rooted in gardening. Youth voices are key in developing the green spaces and the business as it grows. Along the way, we’ve learned many things about what it means to support a youth-led business rooted in gardening, and we hope that this is a useful case study for you.

"This program is very different than school life because people don’t always accept you for who you are [at school]. It’s nice to have a place to go where it’s cool and you can talk about your day and have fun and people are nice.” Kameela, Mighty Greens Youth Staff
A YEAR WITH MIGHTY GREENS

After years of testing out various activities, we’ve developed a rough structure that works well for our team. Every year looks different and is shaped by the current Youth Staff, but the year is always broken up into three seasons and each season tends to have some consistent events and activities.

SPRING SEASON

JANUARY–MARCH
- Conduct outreach for interested youth and encourage Youth Staff to invite friends
- Make value-added products
- Introduce seedling-growing to new Youth Staff
- Review last year’s seedlings and pick varieties for the coming year
- Inventory the greenhouse and order key supplies such as seeds, promix, seedling trays, etc.
- Begin planting spring seedlings—Youth Staff typically plant their first round of cold-weather seedlings (e.g. kale, collards, swiss chard) in the first two weeks of February. They plant spring flowers like zinnias, marigolds, etc. at the end of February.
- Continue planting spring seedlings in early March to accommodate a late-spring seedling sales or account for poor germination of earlier planting
- Track seedling growth
- Begin transplanting (that is, planting the seedlings grown in the greenhouse in the outdoor garden beds) the first wave of cool-weather crops—this typically happens in mid-March, depending on the plant and variety
  - Begin planting summer seedlings (e.g., tomatoes, peppers, etc.)—this is usually in late March/early April

APRIL–MAY
- Seedling sales—Youth Staff plan and run 3-6 seedling sales across the city
- Spring workdays and planting in gardens
- Host Spring CSA
- Encourage youth to take home excess produce and facilitate donations to local partners
- Community Meals: Youth Staff cook several group meals during the spring as more of their produce becomes ready to harvest
- Spring payout: Split profits between youth who participated during the spring season

Tracking seedling growth is an important part of preparing for spring seedling sales.
SUMMER SEASON

JUNE–AUGUST
- 15–20 Youth Staff work with Mighty Greens for 20–25 hours a week for six weeks through the city-funded Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), during which time youth receive stipends for their work. This structure allows for a deeper dive into the business and for more professional-development opportunities.
- Garden maintenance
- Professional development
- Advocacy opportunities
- Value-added product making
- Sell at farmers markets
- Work with other City Blossoms programs that are facilitating programming with younger kids
- Participate in City Blossoms staff meetings
- Community meals: Youth make and eat meals together weekly
- Basil Bonanza: basil-themed potluck to celebrate the summer harvest and all of the people that came together in the green spaces
- Summer payout: in addition to SYEP stipends, we split summer profits between the youth who participated during the summer season

FALL SEASON

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER
- Conduct outreach at the beginning-of-the-school-year events and speak with advisories or classes to share information about YEC and Mighty Greens
- Finish fall planting
- Host Fall CSA
- Make value-added products
- Organize fall workdays with volunteers to clean gardens up and prepare for winter
- Community meals

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER
- Sell value-added products at holiday markets
- Donate the last of the produce to nearby organizations, such as partner food banks
- Fall payout—split fall profits between youth who participated during the season

SYEP youth maintains the garden during the summer.
Workdays: Mighty Greens and City Blossoms co-host garden workdays throughout the year to help with the maintenance of the green spaces. These events are usually 2–3 hours. Volunteers, teachers, neighbors, City Blossoms staff, and youth come together to tackle large projects in the gardens. Although these days are focused on accomplishing a lot of work, we also intend for them to be events that build community and celebrate the spaces and the relationships that come out of them.

Celebrations: Celebration is also central to this program. Mighty Greens youth find many ways to celebrate throughout the year during larger events as well as during smaller gatherings limited to just the Youth Staff. We weave these events throughout the year, and they are key in strengthening community, maintaining the garden, and reinforcing the celebratory nature of this work.

Community Meals: Making and sharing food together has been central to both City Blossoms and Mighty Greens from the beginning. Youth regularly harvest produce from the garden and make recipes to share together. Setting the table, making bouquets, and sharing in a family-style meal is an activity we try to incorporate as often as we can. These moments are how we continue to connect, create safe space, and celebrate our hard work regularly.

Art: We weave art and creative expression into the year at every turn. This runs the gamut from less involved projects, like creating simple labels, to making space for observational drawing, to designing and creating garden signage. The gardens and greenhouses are an ever-changing exhibit that seek to reflect the work of Youth Staff, the many faces that make up our team, and the things we want new visitors to know when they join the space.

Advocacy Work: As reflected in the Mighty Greens’s second goal, which is to “promote food justice and learning,” advocacy is a central focus of their business. Advocacy efforts have ranged throughout the years, reflecting opportunities that come up and the youth’s interests.

Produce Donations: Sharing food through produce donations is central to Mighty Greens’s mission, which is “to improve access to healthy foods in our communities.” It is also an important part of their first goal, which is “to grow, sell and donate to our communities using sustainable and organic practices.” While the frequency and type of donation may vary, youth make sure to donate seedlings and produce multiple times a year.

Youth advocate for social change by participating in a march.
Community Supported Agriculture: Mighty Greens Youth Staff run both spring and fall CSAs, which they offer to school staff. Teachers and school staff have the opportunity to sign up for a 4-6 week CSA each season, and then pick up a weekly bag of produce, herbs, and a value-added product. The CSA provides an opportunity for the Youth Staff to share their expertise with their educators, and school staff get to pick up fresh vegetables and herbs grown on the premises.

Selling at Markets: Selling at markets is an important part of the Mighty Greens business plan. Youth seek out school markets, farmers markets, and community events throughout the year to sell their seedlings, produce, and value-added products.

Product Making: Youth Staff have a large product line, which includes herb salts, teas, and numerous body products. These products sell throughout the year, so Youth Staff regularly harvest and dehydrate ingredients, and they set aside blocks of time for production. Product-making coincides with preparation for larger sales, and youth also plan to build up their inventory when they have the time, like during slow periods for maintenance and harvesting.

Outreach: Youth Staff transition in and out of this business regularly. Due to this transition, Youth Staff make space to connect with peers who may be interested in becoming a part of this work. Youth often join throughout the season, but, often, Youth Staff make concerted efforts to do outreach at the beginning of fall and spring.

Payouts: We split profits between the youth who are participating during the season. Mighty Greens payouts happen once per season. The youth have agreed to save 20% of their earnings each season and invest that money back into their business. They have full control over how to spend the saved amount, and, in the past, they have chosen to buy new types of seeds, swag, or a nice meal for themselves. They divide the remaining 80% amongst the number of Youth Staff, and they pay themselves at an even, hourly rate. We calculate hours based on careful attendance records. Youth receive checks and instructions about how to record their earnings on tax forms if they make a taxable amount.

Professional Development: We try to weave professional development into all three seasons, with more time to devote to it during the summer. Areas of focus include financial literacy, resume work, interviewing practice, talks from community members about local history or how local government works, and talks by other established, local entrepreneurs. Youth Staff have often sought out specific local businesses with expertise in an area that interests them. Depending on the area of interest, we have reached out to local leaders, friends, family, and board members to share knowledge. During the summer, Youth Staff also have more opportunities to explore other areas of City Blossoms, attending staff meetings and sometimes getting the opportunity to shadow other program areas. Throughout the year, Youth Staff also have opportunities to practice networking, whether they’re getting connected with a partner organization, selling at a market, or presenting at a local event on their work.

Garden Care: Gardens are central to Mighty Greens’ business, so caring for these spaces is of the utmost importance, pretty much year round. Youth Staff start growing seedlings in February, start planting outdoors in March, and care for their spaces until they put the gardens to bed in November.
NEXT STEPS ON THE PATH—GRADUATING INTO FELLOWSHIPS
Since City Blossoms's founding, we have striven to create ways for kids and youth of all ages to connect with our green spaces. As many of the youth we worked with aged through our programs, we have struggled to find ways to directly support youth after they move on from high school. We believe that it is critical to create more job opportunities for young people in order to create an equitable environmental movement. In an effort to create such opportunities for young adults, who have either grown up through our programs or have an interest in community-based environmental and food justice work, we developed the Fellowship. Fellow positions are designed to be 10-month-long, part-time jobs that support City Blossoms’s day-to-day programming. The City Blossoms team provides support and tools for Fellows to find and build their own paths toward their professional interests. We hope that our fellowship program will potentially serve as a next step for young people who are particularly interested in this type of work. Because this option is only able to support one to two young people each year, we also work with Mighty Greens juniors and seniors to support a wide range of post-graduate opportunities. The Youth Entrepreneurship Cooperative Program Manager is a resource and a guide for college applications, and supports many students as they engage with the college process. We also provide resources on programs like FoodCorps, City Year, and AmeriCorps for youth interested in continuing similar work.

KEY CONCEPTS
Mighty Greens: A Case Study

A Year with Mighty Greens
• This is the rough structure of our program and a breakdown of the activities and themes that are central to each season.
• Each season looks a little different in Mighty Greens, but some activities are central to the program and incorporated throughout the year.

Next Steps on the Path—Graduating into Fellowships
• We hope that our Fellowship program will serve as a next step for young people who are particularly interested in this work.

THAT’S A WRAP!
The core of this program, and the centerpiece of all of City Blossoms’s work, is youth voice. The young people in our community have guided this program’s development every step of the way. We are constantly humbled and inspired by the awesome, brilliant, creative youth who bring a little bit of their magic into the YEC program. This program has far exceeded our expectations, and we’re so proud to share it with you.

We hope that, at the end of this workbook, you are fired up and ready to get to it! Roll up your sleeves, dig into a book on cooperatives, and start to dream about all the fun projects you can do with the young people in your community. Let us know how it’s going! Keep us in the loop! We want to hear all about your project, program, or organization—the inspiring stuff and the challenging stuff. If you are in Washington, D.C., stop by the City Blossoms Studio and say hi. Or shoot us an email or phone call. We can’t wait to see what you and the amazing youth in your community will create.

City Blossoms
516 Kennedy Street NW
Washington, DC 20011
info@cityblossoms.org
202-882-2628
Power Skills Reference Table

Power Skills are a complex set of abilities built on behavioral patterns, habits of mind, and learning experiences that we might be accustomed to calling “soft skills.” At City Blossoms, we agree with the workforce experts who argue that these types of skills might actually be the most valuable and nuanced assets to an organization, and we celebrate their importance in both workplace preparedness and positive youth development. (Bersin, 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILL</th>
<th>WHAT DOES THIS SKILL MEAN TO THE PROGRAM?</th>
<th>WHY IS THIS SKILL IMPORTANT?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Youth Staff leverage leadership skills to chart the course of their program. They also become leaders in the field by presenting in forums about what they do and how to start similar programs at other schools.</td>
<td>The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017) identifies leadership skill as a key attribute that employers look for in new hires, and notes that having held a leadership position has a relatively high influence on job outlook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Collaborative thinking helps Youth Staff combine their different strengths and knowledge bases as team members to make the best collective choices for their organization and successfully complete necessary tasks.</td>
<td>The U.S. Department of Labor (2012) suggests that teamwork is an essential soft skill for teens to learn, as it helps them come to the workplace prepared to navigate working relationships, and knowing when to step up and step back in an effort to achieve a shared goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Youth Staff use entrepreneurial skills when they refine their idea for a company in order to turn it into a brand new business with coherent branding, profit margins, and paychecks.</td>
<td>The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017) notes that employers value entrepreneurial skills and the associated willingness to take risks. The EASEL Lab (n.d.), which is the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s laboratory for Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning, notes that entrepreneurial skills may be a part of vocational competence, and therefore contribute to healthy adolescent growth—they name competence as one of the “5 Cs” of positive youth development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SKILL</td>
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<td>WHY IS THIS SKILL IMPORTANT?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Youth Staff use creativity when they imagine their business into being, and they employ it in the everyday practices of running the company once they’ve made it. They dream up new products to offer customers, think of beneficial ways to use their strengths, and also craft art installations to activate a welcoming garden space.</td>
<td>The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) suggests that the ability to think creatively, where young people can generate innovative ideas and imaginative solutions, is a key skill for the labor market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication skills help Youth Staff navigate meetings, collective decision-making processes, community agreements, social media outreach, markets, conferences, and forums.</td>
<td>The U.S. Department of Labor (2012) identifies business communication as an essential skill, explaining that teens will need to know how to articulate their points and practice effective listening amongst supervisors and coworkers, which is different from communicating with classmates or family members. The National Association for Colleges and Employers (2017) identifies written and verbal communication skills as two key attributes that employers look for in applicants. The Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts Standards identify oratory skills and civil, democratic discussion as explicit learning goals for high school students (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices &amp; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>Youth Staff draw on organizational skills to manage themselves as a collective, and they take on responsibility to keep track of their materials, funds, products, tasks, tools, and business and garden planning.</td>
<td>The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017) claims that organizational ability and attention to detail are among the top skills that teens need for the workforce.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Power Skills Reference Table continued*
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILL</th>
<th>WHAT DOES THIS SKILL MEAN TO THE PROGRAM?</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Literacy</td>
<td>Youth Staff learn about managing money and discuss personal budgets in the program. They also gain business finance skills by managing their company budget, setting their own prices, and calculating paychecks.</td>
<td>Youth.gov (n.d.), a U.S. government site that aims to assist and improve youth programs, notes that instruction and practice in managing money is not something that young people usually come across at school, and that learning about personal finances can help protect them from predatory loans and improve their savings strategies later on. The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) identifies money management as a key skill that is necessary for success in the workforce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical Thinking</td>
<td>Youth Staff employ the formulas they learned to calculate volume in class to determine how much soil they need to fill raised beds of differing shapes. They also use modeling to envision the growth rate of their seedlings, the profit margins for their value-added products, the produce yields they might generate depending on planting plans, and the amount of materials they'd need depending on how many trays of seedlings they want to grow.</td>
<td>The Common Core State Standards in Mathematics identify geometric calculation and modeling ability as explicit learning goals for high school students. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices &amp; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Youth Staff practice empathy with one another by committing to community agreements that are important to their teammates, and they strengthen their empathic abilities when they explore what an inclusive space means to everyone, and what others might need in order to feel safe and represent</td>
<td>The Five Cs Model of Positive Youth Development identifies caring/compassion as one of the “5 Cs” of positive youth development. In the “5 Cs” model, the presence of such characteristics suggest that youth are thriving and in the process of healthy development. (Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Laboratory, n.d.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Personnel Management</td>
<td>Youth Staff organize themselves into teams and individual roles in order to achieve cooperative goals. They practice making staffing choices based on interest and skill, observing the effects of human resources on organizational cohesion and output.</td>
<td>The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) suggests that managing each other as personnel in projects that have limited resources and roles, including the management of their own participation, can enhance essential employability skills in young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Management</td>
<td>Youth Staff explore the cost of the materials, space, and labor that they need in order to grow the produce they want and generate the value-added products that interest their customers. They balance costs, predicted profits, and availability of resources to make decisions together.</td>
<td>The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) ranks resource management as a top employability skill for young people, suggesting they practice allocating limited finances and materials in educational projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Development</td>
<td>Youth Staff test their abilities on different tasks, learning what they like and what they are good at. They discover what kind of positive role they can play in their community as young business leaders, and discuss how their different experiences and traditions help shape what they bring to the table.</td>
<td>The Five Cs Model of Positive Youth Development (Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Laboratory, n.d.) includes self-worth as an important part of the confidence necessary for positive youth development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Social Impact + Community Responsibility</td>
<td>Youth Staff explore the ways that their business can have a social impact by making choices about donating produce, deciding whether to join advocacy and mutual aid efforts, and discussing the role of social justice in their collective efforts. They also have the option to share a portion of the food they grow with each other and their families.</td>
<td>The Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Laboratory (n.d.) notes that contribution to “self, community, and society” is a healthy habit that develops in youth after they have experienced advanced levels of positive youth development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKILL</td>
<td>WHAT DOES THIS SKILL MEAN TO THE PROGRAM?</td>
<td>WHY IS THIS SKILL IMPORTANT?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competence + Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Youth Staff gain a myriad of hard garden skills through participation in the everyday tasks of their business, which nurtures a sense of competence and self-efficacy—They learn how to plant and harvest. They tackle design problems in order to use the growing space efficiently and rotate the produce according to nutrient needs and season. They make various horticultural choices like opting to companion plant when doing so benefits yield, and they decide whether to use an herb in a product based on potential health benefits or pleasing aroma.</td>
<td>The Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Laboratory (n.d.) identifies competence as one of the “5 Cs” of positive youth development. They note that vocational competence, or possessing the skill and knowledge to carry out a job well, is beneficial to healthy youth development. Change to Albert Bandura (1977), professor at Stanford University and researcher who developed the concept of self-efficacy, explains that persistence in activities that lead to success increases a sense of personal effectiveness. This sense of effectiveness, or self-efficacy, makes people better able to cope with difficult situations in future.</td>
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### sample Mighty Greens budget

**Budget 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCOME</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<td>Seedlings</td>
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<td>CSA</td>
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<td>Tabling Events/Fairs</td>
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<td>Farmer’s Markets</td>
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<td>Contracts</td>
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<td><strong>Total Income</strong></td>
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<table>
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<td>Fees</td>
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<td>Office Supplies</td>
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<td>Consultants</td>
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<td>Swag</td>
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<tr>
<td>Market Supplies</td>
<td>$250.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expense</strong></td>
<td><strong>$11,390</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


how to build a raised bed resource sheet

City Blossoms has been co-designing and building kid-and-youth-driven outdoor classrooms for over 10 years. We collaborate with students, parents, educators and neighbors, and we aim to create safe green spaces that provide opportunities for educational and social growth.

Our partners often decide to include raised beds in their garden designs, and we frequently get questions about how to build them. There are lots of ways to construct raised beds and a wide range of materials to choose from. Here are a few ideas on different materials to consider, along with information about how we tend to construct raised beds.

WHAT TO BUILD WITH
We highly recommend using lumber that is 2” thick. This will help increase the lifespan of your raised beds and will limit how much your beds bow as they age. Here are some different wood options to consider:

- **Untreated Cedar**: Our favorite option when possible. A more expensive choice, and usually sold only at lumberyards, but it’s pest-resistant, attractive, safe for food production, biodegradable, and has a life expectancy of 5-7 years. If you get the knotty-grade cedar as opposed to the clear-grade, you’ll save money.

- **Treated Wood**: Less expensive than cedar, and available at most hardware stores. Although chemically treated wood resists fungal destruction and decay, giving it a life expectancy of 15+ years, it may not be safe for food production.

- **Untreated Pine**: Less expensive than treated wood and cedar, and available at many hardware stores. This option is not naturally pest-resistant, has a life expectancy of 4-5 years, and is safe for food production.

- **Recycled Wood**: Usually the cheapest (and sometimes a free) option. Its lifespan varies but 3-4 years is a good estimate. It may be hard to determine if this wood is safe for food production.

- **High-Density Polyethylene or Composite Wood**: A mix of recycled wood and plastic, or completely plastic. This is more expensive than treated wood, easy to work with, comes in a few different colors, and has a life expectancy of 20+ years.

Other materials to experiment with: cinder blocks (may not be safe for edible crops), hay bales, logs, stones, bricks, metal-sheeting.

WHY USE RAISED BEDS
Some advantages of raised beds are...

- They create growing space using healthy soil or compost
- They prevent soil compaction and provide good drainage
- Due to their height, they may help people with different physical abilities garden more comfortably, making gardens more accessible
- They increase and organize growing space in small areas
- They control weeds

WHERE TO PLACE RAISED BEDS
Depending on what you’re planting, consider sunlight, water access, and terrain when deciding where to place your raised beds.
HOW TO BUILD A CEDAR RAISED BED
Here are some directions for building a 3’ x 3’ x 1’ cedar raised bed, which you can install on top of soil.

Building Materials:
• 2+ people
• Four 4”x4” untreated posts cut to 13”
• Eight 2”x6” untreated cedar boards cut to 3’ pieces
• Approximately 32 3” deck screws/outdoor wood screws
• Drill and bits
• (Optional) 6” metal straps*
• (Optional) Approximately 12 1” deck screws/outdoor wood screws*
• (Optional) 6” PVC pipes cut into 8” segments*
  *These are to create season-extending crop cover, and can also be added after you have installed your raised bed.

Planting Materials:
• Compost mix: there are many soil calculators available online to help you estimate how much soil you will need for your new raised bed.
• Mulch: spreading natural shredded mulch around your new plants is like giving them a protective blanket. It can help limit the growth of weeds, regulate soil temperature, and increase water retention.
• Recycled cardboard: putting down cardboard before you fill your new raised bed with soil will help deter weeds. It’s also a great way to reuse cardboard boxes.

Steps:
1. Cut the 2”x6” boards to the planned length and width of the bed (or ask the lumberyard to cut them).
2. Cut the 4”x4” posts to the height of the bed + a few extra inches.
3. Make a side panel by screwing two 2”x6” boards to two 4”x4” posts, using a triangular shape with three screws each side. Make sure the top board is flush with the posts.
4. Turn panel upside down and add additional panels the 4”x4” posts, creating the three other sides of the raised bed.
5. Optional—Attach PVC pipes every 2’ (or so) along the sides of the beds to be able to build season-extending crop cover.
6. Clear the selected place for your bed by removing weeds and grass.
7. Dig your 4”x4” posts into the ground until the whole bed is level, securing it in its new spot.
8. Cover the ground inside the bed with a thick layer of cardboard to prevent weeds from growing.
9. Fill your bed to the top with soil mix, which will settle in a few days.
10. Optional—if your raised bed is in a weedy area, make a cardboard-and-mulch border to keep unwanted roots from sneaking in through the bottom of your bed.
11. Plant some of your favorite veggies, flowers, or herbs.
12. Cover the soil with mulch after the seedlings get themselves established, being sure to leave a
13. Enjoy the new things you grow!

If you have any questions about where to source materials, or want to share a picture of your new raised bed, please reach out to info@cityblossoms.org!
References


