

THE GARDENWORKS PROJECT

Community Services Block Grant 2026 Funding Proposal DuPage County, Illinois

Description of Need

Food insecurity remains a critical and growing threat to the health and stability of DuPage County, Illinois residents. Defined as a lack of consistent access to enough nutritious food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life (*USDA*), food insecurity affects more than 83,000 residents or 1 in 10 in our community (*USDA; Northern Illinois Food Bank, 2021*). This gap is even more pronounced in areas that received a 5 on the Food Insecurity Index* where rising housing costs, stagnant wages, and recent reductions in federal nutrition programs (SNAP) have intensified reliance on emergency food systems.

When individuals lack access to nutritious food, the impact extends beyond hunger contributing to poor health outcomes, academic challenges, and economic instability. Addressing food insecurity is both a matter of compassion and a strategic investment for building a stronger, healthier community for all.

The emergency food system functions as a safety net to promote food security. In FY2021, Northern Illinois Food Bank distributed more than 18.6 million meals in DuPage County serving an estimated 72,580 residents facing food insecurity. Additionally, the 2024 Endeavor Health Community Needs Assessment found an average food insecurity rate of 11% across their service area confirming that 1 in 10 households within the area face limited or uncertain access to food.

Organization Description

The mission of **The GardenWorks Project** is to address food insecurity by creating and nurturing connections between food growers, local food pantries, and individuals in need.

Founded in 2012 with the installation of four home gardens for food pantry clients, The GardenWorks Project became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2014. Since then, we have:

- Installed 2,600 home gardens for families facing food insecurity.
- Established 26 community gardens across western Chicagoland.
- Distributed thousands of pounds of fresh produce annually to local food pantries and directly to income-eligible residents.

In 2024, The GardenWorks Project refined its community garden model to include:

1. **Household Gardens:** 4 x 8 garden plots at income-eligible housing communities.
 2. **Food Pantry Gardens:** On-site gardens where food is harvested for direct pantry distribution.
 3. **Market Gardens:** Gardens dedicated to growing produce for delivery to partner pantries.
 4. **Group Home Gardens:** Gardens installed for residential facilities serving individuals with ongoing care needs.
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Program Overview

The **Produce for People and Pantries (PFPP)** initiative is a five-year program designed to address food insecurity by installing and supporting community gardens that connect directly to local food pantries and income eligible households. Now entering its fourth year, PFPP continues to expand access to fresh, locally grown produce through partnerships with food pantries, schools, housing communities, and local organizations.

By continuing this program in 2026, The GardenWorks Project will strengthen food resilience and provide sustainable, community-driven solutions to hunger.

Funding Proposal

The GardenWorks Project respectfully requests **\$70,000** in continued CSBG funding for **Year 4 of 5** for PFPP in 2026.

Funds will:

1. Support six existing community garden sites with soil, compost, seedlings, and staff and volunteer coordination.
 2. Provide support for 182 garden beds across 24 locations in DuPage County.
 3. Install and support two new community garden sites in high-need areas.
 4. Develop partnerships for future expansion in 2027.
 5. Provide educational workshops, culturally relevant food resources, and support for the Fresh Food Connect app to connect home gardeners with food pantries.
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Key Data Points

The 2024 Food Insecurity Index (Conduent Healthy Communities Institute) * is a measure of socioeconomic and household hardship correlated with poor food access. The index is part of

Conduent's SocioNeeds Index® Suite, which provides analytics around social determinants of health to advance equitable outcomes for a range of topics.

All zip codes, counties, and county equivalents in the United States are given an index value from 0 (low need) to 100 (high need). To help you find the areas of highest need in your community, the selected locations are ranked from 1 (low need) to 5 (high need) based on their index value relative to similar locations within the region.

Based on the 2024 Food Insecurity Index (Conduent Healthy Communities Institute) and the County Health Assessment by IMPACT DuPage, the following DuPage County cities will be the focus for new partnerships in 2026:

Hanover Park	60133	5	69.0
Bensenville	60106	5	66.6
Addison	60101	5	61.0
Glendale Heights	60139	5	59.6

These areas represent priority locations for future garden sites and partnerships.

Program Results to Date (2023 – 2025)

In 2023 (Year 1 planning year), 2024 (Year 2 five gardens*), and 2025 (Year 3 two gardens), CSBG funding supported the installation of seven community gardens, serving three food pantries and three income-eligible apartment complexes and one preschool.

Garden Site	Partners	Produce Distribution
Timber Lake Community Garden (est. 2024)	WeGo Together for Kids, Apartment Site Manager	Produce remains on site
Colony Park Garden (est. 2024)	Mercy Housing	Produce remains on site
New Hope Community Garden (est. 2024)	Healthy West Chicago, Church staff and volunteers, Lehman School Pantry, Wayne Township Food Pantry	Produce is delivered to Lehman School Pantry and Wayne Township Food Pantry
Burhani Park Garden (est. 2024)	Project Rise Volunteers	Produce is delivered to Ann M Jeans Food Pantry
Hope's House (New 2025)	Catholic Charities	Produce remains on site
Villa Park Early Childhood Center (New 2025)	Villa Park ECC Staff & volunteers	Produce remains on site

Please note that in 2025, the Green Trails Garden site was eliminated from the program due to the site taking a new direction.

Program Objectives (2026)

1. Support and sustain six community garden sites with soil, compost, seedlings, and staff/volunteer support.
 2. Install two new garden sites in high-need areas.
 3. Build leadership and sustainability plans for community-led garden management by 2027.
 4. Expand the *Fresh Food Connect* program to increase homegrown food donations.
 5. Improve culturally relevant food distribution in partnership with local pantries.
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2026 Project Timeline

MONTH	WORK
January 2026	Taskforce meetings to review and assess sites 1 – 6; Host workshop for seed starting
February 2026	Taskforce meetings to confirm and prepare plans for new sites; prepare supply orders
March 2026	Spring garden prep workshop; confirm food pantry delivery schedule
April 2026	Volunteer kickoff; garden site spring clean-up
May 2026	Bed prep; soil/compost deliveries/seedling installation
June 2026	Pantry deliveries begin, Work & Learn events (4x per week)
July 2026	Pantry deliveries, Work & Learn events (4 x per week; taskforce meetings to identify sites for 2027
August 2026	Pantry deliveries, Work & Learn events (4 x per week); prep for fall
September 2026	Pantry deliveries, Work & Learn event (4 x per week)
October 2026	Final pantry deliveries; fall garden clean-up
November	Volunteer appreciation; client surveys
December 2026	Prepare for 2027

2026 Budget – \$70,000

CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Program Support	\$57,500
Educational Events / Outreach	\$2,500
Administrative Costs	\$10,000
TOTAL:	\$70,000

Measurable Outcomes (2026)

The GardenWorks Project will track and report on the following outcomes for Year 4 of the **Produce for People and Pantries Program (PFPP)**:

Outcome Category	2026 Target	Measurement Method
Pounds of Produce Donated	7,500 pounds	Fresh Food Connect App
Households Served	100	Program Records
Pantries Supported	4	Partner Agreements
New Garden Sites Added	2	Installation Records
Volunteers Engaged	100	Sign-in Sheets
Workshops Conducted	4	Attendance Records
Task Force Meetings	4	Agendas & Attendance

Long-Term Impact (through 2027)

- Establish ten total sustainable garden sites.
- Build a self-sustaining community leadership model at each site, reducing the need for ongoing grant funding.
- Strengthen food security infrastructure in partnership with food pantries and social service agencies.

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