

# I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

*One page only.* This page will be shared electronically with Grant Panel Members & Fund Advisors.  
Note: If Philanthropy Network's Common Grant Application is used, CCCF's **Summary Sheet MUST accompany application.**  
To obtain an electronic version of this application, visit [www.chescocf.org](http://www.chescocf.org)

**Date 06/1/2023**

## **Contact Information**

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## **Organization Information:**

### **Field/s of Interest:**

Arts, Culture & Humanities       Environment/Animal Welfare       Education  
 Health       Human Services       Religion

**Mission:** Now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year, Trellis for Tomorrow provides highly impactful programming at the intersection of food security, youth workforce readiness, and environmental sustainability. Utilizing community-based gardens as living classrooms, Trellis delivers hands-on, experiential programs that foster participants' own inherent compassion and resilience. Our programs grow, harvest, and donate over 30,000 pounds of fresh, organic produce annually, providing immediate nutrition to thousands of food-insecure community members. Trellis's programs inspire all participants to become positive agents of change in their own lives and to build healthy, sustainable, secure communities around them.

**Geographic Area Served** (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served): Trellis is headquartered in the borough of Phoenixville. Youth programs are centered in Phoenixville and Spring City and serve the Pottstown area encompassing both Chester and Montgomery Counties. Our Food for All program has partner garden sites throughout Chester County as well as Delaware, Montgomery, Philadelphia, and Berks Counties.

**Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served:** Trellis serves underrepresented youth in Chester and Montgomery Counties and food-insecure individuals in the Greater Philadelphia Region. Annually the organization impacts over 5,000 individuals.

**Annual Budget** \$ 1,180,973      9 # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff  
85.8% of budget for program expenses      8 # of Board Volunteers  
5.2 % of budget for administrative expenses      648 # of Active Non-Board Volunteers  
9.0% of budget for fundraising expenses      800 # of Volunteer Hours  
*100 % total*

**Top 3-5 funding sources:** CC Dept of Workforce Development, MontcoWorks, Phoenixville Community Health Foundation, Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, Nelson Foundation

**Is this grant proposal for:** Capacity Building  or General Operating ?

**If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is:**

Mission, Vision & Strategy     Governance & Leadership     Partnerships & Collaborations  
 Fundraising, Development & Marketing     Technology    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation:** \$ 5,000.00

**Proposal Summary:** A grant to Trellis for Tomorrow will support youth educational grants for students aged 12-18 participating in the SEED Skills workforce development program.

## II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE TRELLIS FOR TOMORROW 2023

### 1. Nonprofit's history, goals, key achievements & distinctiveness

Trellis for Tomorrow (Trellis) grew organically out of a commitment to youth development and a deep-seated belief in the power of experiential learning. Beginning in 2003 as Triskeles Foundation, the organization evolved over the last two decades to become a regional leader in utilizing organic, local gardening as a tool for youth workforce development and alleviating food insecurity.

Trellis's 20 years of work have brought to light the unique and impactful intersection of youth empowerment programs and nature-based activities, in particular the power of growing food. The organization believes that engaging people in addressing food system sustainability in their own community is the most viable pathway to ensure equitable access to healthy food for the long term. Teaching youth to become independent, self-sufficient, and food-secure individuals directly impacts their long-term success, including lifelong positive health and economic outcomes.

Our approach provides healthful organic produce now to individuals that need it most, creates sustainable urban garden sites for ongoing food production, and empowers our youth to break the cycle of poverty and food insecurity in their own lives. As we invest in not only short-term but long-term systemic changes, we create pathways for communities to become healthy and food secure. Trellis delivers three highly effective and impactful food security and youth development programs in Chester County and the surrounding areas that intersect in myriad ways.

**Food for All (FFA)** is a program that partners with municipal, corporate, faith-based, educational, and community organizations to establish and maintain on-site organic gardens. Trellis provides garden design and installation support, and garden inputs (seedlings, soil, amendments, etc.), and delivers education on organic gardening, food insecurity, and food system sustainability. Partner organizations provide land, an engaged garden team, and a commitment to donating at least 50% of all produce harvested to area food banks or pantries. FFA estimates engaging approximately 4,600 people annually. In a typical year through FFA, 30,000 pounds of organic produce is donated to area food banks and pantries, impacting approximately 120,000 meals. The FFA program also offers educational presentations and workshops for gardeners to learn about food justice and systemic breakdowns in our food system including food insecurity, and the lack of access to quality, nutrient-dense, organic food.

**SEED Skills (SEED)** is a youth workforce development program offering youth two, 4-week, summer sessions that include a dynamic combination of hands-on work, classroom curriculum, and interactive activities. Participants "earn while they learn", managing large organic gardens in their own neighborhoods, where they grow, harvest, and market organic produce to their neighbors. They also learn to prepare healthy food for themselves and their families. Trellis staff leads meaningful activities for youth participants that sharpen their skills and social and emotional capacities, such as personal goal setting, responsibility and accountability, and active engagement. Educational sessions also extend outside of the garden, engaging youth in understanding systems thinking and systems change through targeted curriculum and compelling presentations from local entrepreneurs and change makers. Since its inception as a pilot program in 2018, SEED has increased from one garden site with 15 participants, to four sites with 70 participants in 2022.

**GROW Careers (GROW)** places and pays for youth ages 16 to 24 to work in area nonprofits and social impact businesses. GROW can serve as a transition for adolescents completing the SEED Skills program or be an entry point for new participants. In addition to placement and payment, Trellis provides one-on-one mentorship, and group professional development workshops for the interns. Throughout the year, Trellis works to recruit interested internship hosts and interns by interviewing all who are eligible based on the program criteria. Interns interview with one or more hosts, providing an opportunity to learn and enhance interview skills. Throughout the process, Trellis staff work with each individual to understand their needs and match applicants with organizations whose values and goals mutually align.

## **2. Funding request**

### **Description of key initiatives:**

**SEED Skills (SEED)** is a workforce development program offering historically disadvantaged youth ages 12-18 an 'earn while you learn' program that teaches career readiness skills through experiential learning. Two concurrent 4-week summer sessions include a dynamic combination of hands-on work, classroom curriculum, leadership opportunities, and interactive activities.

1. Youth participants **manage large organic gardens** in their own neighborhoods, where they learn to grow, harvest, and market organic produce to their neighbors. They also learn to prepare healthy food for themselves and their families, promoting long-term food security.
2. Trellis staff lead **developmental activities** for youth participants that sharpen their work readiness skills and social and emotional capacities, such as personal goal setting, responsibility and accountability, and active engagement.
3. They engage in **educational sessions** outside of the garden and feature Trellis's compelling systems thinking curriculum and expose youth to numerous area business, nonprofit and civic professionals.

The primary goal of SEED Skills is to prepare diverse youth ages 12-18 for post-secondary school success by developing and advancing the following four capacities: Leadership Skills, Nutrition and Wellness, Workforce Readiness, and Personal Agency. As a result of participating in the program and advancing the above capacities, youth experience growth in social and emotional learning capacities. As they grow, young people with greater SEL capacities are more college and career-ready, experience better mental health and social functioning, and report a greater sense of overall well-being. Additionally, the use of community gardens in programming allows them to support food security initiatives in their own neighborhoods while building the skills necessary to support their own long-term career and educational goals.

Trellis delivers approximately 450 hours of out-of-school time programming through SEED Skills per year. Youth who participate benefit from mentorship, a formal leadership track, increased access to local social capital, and a powerful curriculum focused on systems change. In addition to SEED Skills youth being better prepared to tackle the challenges associated with post-secondary school life, they are also having an impressive community impact. In 2022, 70 teens across four SEED Skills sites distributed over 4,000 pounds of organic produce to 80 households and area agencies. While doing so, and through a focused curriculum and targeted activities, they realized measurable improvements in transferrable work skills such as goal setting and achievement, teamwork, engagement, and ownership.

***As an 'earn while you learn' program, each student receives a stipend over the course of the program. The amount varies depending on the length of participation, but the average is \$500 per person. A \$5,000 grant to support the SEED Skills program will provide 10 students with educational grants, allowing them to earn money while participating.***

### **Specific needs & issues to be addressed:**

Trellis workforce development programming is delivered in economically disadvantaged communities in the Greater Philadelphia Region, currently in Pottstown, Phoenixville, and Spring City. About 50% of GROW and SEED participants are in Chester County and 50% in Montgomery County. These programs address several unmet needs in the target population and broadly support at-risk, low-income adolescents as they break the cycle of poverty through workforce development and career-building skills -- skills that provide a pathway to long-term financial stability via a career that pays a living wage.

The FFA program delivers nutrient-dense, organic produce to food-insecure individuals and families across the region. According to Philabundance, 1 in 10 households in the Philadelphia Region are food insecure, meaning they do not regularly have access to affordable, healthy food. Ongoing food insecurity is a complex issue that involves more than just hunger and can lead to long-term, negative health, and life outcomes. Children and youth are especially vulnerable to food insecurity.

Our region needs innovative programs that can impact multiple sectors to solve systemic challenges. Trellis is providing programs that not only create systems of available fresh food for community members who need it but are investing in the development of youth to empower them to become leaders, become healthy food-secure citizens, and work towards changing their long-term life outcomes in a positive way.

### **Why it is important to fund this now:**

Trellis's unique regional programming is needed now more than ever. Incorporating short- and long-term goals to address food insecurity, Trellis's food justice model is impacting individuals at a critical time. Food-insecure households are recovering at a disproportionately slower pace from the COVID-19 pandemic and are still in need of supportive food services. Furthermore, adolescents are struggling more than ever mentally and emotionally. Rates of suicidal ideation, drug use, anxiety, and depression among adolescents were already rising significantly and then were greatly exacerbated by the pandemic. Life for teens in low-income communities is already challenging. The added stress of the pandemic and a world immersed in social media and the near-constant bombardment of information (mostly negative) combine to create feelings of overwhelm and lack of control in an already tumultuous time of life.

One of the core ways to combat this epidemic as a community is by providing opportunities for connectedness. "Teens are resilient, and we know what works to support their mental health: feeling connected to school and family." As a program focused on providing connection, mentorship, career readiness, and community, Trellis is playing a vital role in the mental health of its youth participants. "Building strong bonds and relationships with adults and friends at school, at home, and in the community provides youth with a sense of connectedness. This feeling of connectedness is important and can protect adolescents from poor mental health, and other risks like drug use and violence." (<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health/index.htm>)

One of the distinguishing factors in Trellis' service delivery is that it addresses food insecurity from both angles – by providing healthy, organic food now to those who need it, and by empowering youth to grow into self-sufficient, food-secure adults with the ability to impact their community for the greater good. The youth development programs impact youth, their families, and their communities by providing support for career readiness, post-secondary school success, educational opportunities, nutrition education, access to fresh healthy foods, and an increase in community bonds that directly and positively affect mental health. This unique combination of positive outcomes is a powerful force in participants' lives and is life-changing for all involved.

### **How impact & results will be demonstrated:**

#### **SEED Skills Primary Goals:**

- Youth will remain in the program for multiple years and advance along the leadership track
- Youth will learn to grow organic produce, prepare healthy meals, and practice self-care
- Youth will demonstrate gains in five social and emotional learning (SEL) capacities
- Youth will demonstrate gains in transferrable work skills
- Youth will understand how to effect change in their own lives and in their communities

In 2023, SEED Skills will grow to 5 outdoor experiential learning sites and increase the number of youth participants to 85, an over 20% increase. Additionally, SEED Skills will implement new and improved tiered learning opportunities for youth of varying ages and interest levels, and enhance social capital, mentorship, and training opportunities. The program aims to significantly increase returning participant interest and engagement in the leadership track, with the possibility of an 85% increase in active youth leaders in 2023. Trellis will improve crop plans and management of all SEED gardens and will add water-cooled produce sheds in each of our SEED gardens to improve community engagement. This specifically will allow community recipients more access to available produce.