OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY
CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY FUND

Seeds of Resilience Courtyard

Grant Type
Annual Grant

Application Type
Final Application

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African American Student Affairs

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Project Manager 2 Role
Co-lead

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Fiscal Officer Department Name
Provost's Business Office

Requested Funding Amount

Only enter this number after completing the budget sheet (the budget template will round up your request).
Mini Grants may request $250 up to $5,000.
Annual Grants may request $5,001 up to $100,000, and up to three years of funding.

Year 1:
$99900

Year 2:

Year 3:

Project Name
Seeds of Resilience Courtyard

Primary Project Category
Social Sustainability (including Social/Environmental Justice)

Secondary Project Category
Campus Life (Health & Wellbeing, Behavior Change

Background and Context

Please provide relevant background about your organization/team including your mission and/or expertise. Lay out the rationale for the proposed project, focusing on the issue that your project would address. You may also share how the project is new or how it complements, builds upon, or scales existing initiatives. This section is meant to give us more information about you and the context for the project, while the questions below provide space to go into detail about your proposal's plan and specifics.

Response:

The Dream: This project was born in December 2023, inspired by Dr. DelMar's time with the

Students for Sustainability club as Director of Project SOAR. When she stepped into the role as Director of African American Student Affairs (AASA), she felt committed to integrating sustainable practices into the MLK Jr. building—a space that has held significance for the Black community on and off campus for over 30 years. She started by planting yellow aloe near a downspout and began talking with students about bringing in stock tanks for gardening. Many of the students that frequented the MLK Jr. building have never had the chance to hold truly healthy soil in their hands. They also often lack access to fresh produce in their daily diet, especially since the campus pantry took a budget cut due to the University's financial crisis. Systemic barriers have long denied Black and Brown communities access to green spaces, and the MLK Jr. building courtyard facing E. 1st St. is a glaring example of that inequity. Motivated by these realities, Dr. DelMar reached out to the UA School Garden Workshop (UA SGW), to share her vision for transforming the space. In mid-December 2023, members of the UA SGW joined her in the courtyard to explore the possibilities. That's when this dream began to take shape.

The MLK Jr. building is the heart of the Black community at the UA, but it wasn't always. In 1989, Black students protested for greater institutional support and resources to address their unique needs. In response, the university repurposed a vacant fraternity house slated for demolition and named it the Martin Luther King Jr. building. By 1991, African American Student Affairs was born—a floor of the building became a dedicated space for cultivating leadership, social Resilience, and academic excellence for and by those students. In 2017, long-overdue upgrades were made to the building, and in 2018, the entire building was officially designated as a space officially for Black students. Yet as of summer 2023, the building's exterior didn't reflect the vibrant energy within. Thanks to financial assistance from former President Robbins' office, a mural by local artist Nolan Patterson was installed on the north side of the building. The mural, with its vivid colors and a diverse group of young Black people framed by a desert backdrop, declares: "To find joy is to find freedom." This was a step toward honoring the building's significance—but the transformation isn't complete. Located near the corner of E. 1st Street and Mountain Ave., on what is known as "sorority and fraternity row," the MLK Jr. building stands in stark contrast to the Panhellenic organizations nearby. Their mansions boast immaculate landscaping, while the MLK courtyard is little more than a patch of dirt surrounded by concrete and asphalt. This disparity mirrors a broader narrative in this country: the intentional neglect of Black and Brown spaces compared to the intentional development of others.

Project Description

Please provide a thorough description and explanation of your project. Be explicit in what your team is proposing. What will your project's outcomes be and how will you achieve them? Outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely.

Response:

The courtyard must be reimagined to reflect the energy, innovation, and joy that radiates from within the MLK Jr. building. It's more than just landscaping; it's about creating a sustainable green space that fosters healing, connection, and growth sanctuary for historically marginalized students in a campus environment that often overlooks their needs. All UA students deserve green spaces that connect communities and promote wellness. This project reimagines the small "green" space along

E. 1st St. at the MLK Jr. building to do just that. From a depressing patch of dirt to a dynamic teaching and learning space to discuss issues of environmental resilience and learn about gardening and sustainability. It will be a space where we can share our skills and engage in current and traditional harvesting practices, and a welcoming CatTran Stop among other things. Old scraggly oleander bushes will be removed, the ground dug down to sidewalk level, and two levels of semi-circle seating will be built to create amphitheater-style seating along the existing half wall jutting out from the north side of the building. The base of this circle/amphitheater will be permeable pavers for passive water harvesting. Along the west wall of the courtyard will be stock tanks for gardening. Near the northwest corner of the building will be a large water harvesting tank to catch water from the downspout. Once construction is done, we'll plant native flowering plants to attract pollinators, and a native tree to eventually provide some shade to the seating area in the summer. We'll also be adding an accessible gardening bed so students using mobility aids can participate in the gardening activities. The outcome will be to create a sustainable and thriving Seeds of Resilience courtyard by summer 2026. The courtyard will be a place where students and the campus community can learn from one another about how to be better stewards of the Sonoran Desert we find ourselves living and working in, while simultaneously learning more about ourselves as complex, yet temporary tenants of this place.

Timeline

Please provide a timeline breakdown for the key steps in your project. The timeline can be basic, but please include anticipated timeframes for each major step, including any key dates for when certain elements must start or be completed. The timeline can be in list format.

Response:

May 2025: Find out we won the sustainability grant!!
June 2025: Bring all stakeholders to the table (Student project team, UA facilities management, renovations services, grounds services, UA School Garden Project, MLK building managers, etc.) to discuss/finalize construction plan
June 2025: Design charette workshop with School Garden workshop and student project team via Zoom
July 2025: Funding dispersed, demo and rerouting of water/electric
August 25, 2025: First day of fall 2025 semester
Through fall semester: Seeds of Resilience programming planning
September 2025: building/mason work
October 2025: bring in stock tanks, planting of native plants and tree
November 2025: Grand Opening and Celebration
Spring 2026: Seeds of Resilience programming
Spring 2026 and on: project evaluation and reporting

Budget Narrative

Use this section to provide supplemental justification for the items you are requesting on your budget sheet. Please break down your justifications into the budget categories: Personnel or operating budget. Do not list out

each expense or repeat notes made in the budget template, but instead address why the line items are being requested and the purpose they will serve, providing elaboration when necessary.
If you are requesting funding for personnel, use this section to elaborate on the position you are creating and how the budget and timeline was established for it. If you plan to hire students, describe in what capacity. Describe relevant details thoroughly (wages, responsibilities, duration of job, extent of involvement, how you will solicit/ market these opportunities etc.).
Ensure the descriptions match the line items in the budget sheet.
If matching or supporting funds are secured for the project, identify the source and amount in this section, and detail the impact of the matching funds on your overall budget.

Response:

Under personnel, funding is allocated for 62 hours for 1 undergraduate student lead project team member. There are approximately 31 weeks of school in an Academic Year. Realizing that some weeks there will be a lot of work, and some weeks there will be none, I averaged it out to about 2 hrs/week. I feel the student leaders on this project (1 undergrad/1 grad), are both well versed in sustainability and deserve to be compensated for their time. The total for the undergrad student comes to $992 with $19.84 ERE. Under personnel, I have allocated $9858.38 for a .25 GA spring 2026 only. This amount includes tuition and ERE. This is for Jamaica's current Graduate Assistant Marnesha Jones, an Etymology PhD student, who, under her current contract, will be able to contribute .25 of her .5 assignment until the grant she is hired under expires December 30, 2025. She is listed as co-lead on this project and her expertise on bugs and environmental sustainability will be an asset. She will largely lead this project in Jamaica's likely absence (due to anti-DEI orders). Funded personnel will collaborate with members of the UA School Garden Workshop to conceptualize, plan, budget, and execute the space. Funded personnel will also work with the other co-lead, faculty member Dr. Jerome Dotson to developing the programming that will take place once the garden is completed. Under the operating budget, $87,000 has been requested for demo, construction (FM assures this can happen in 6-8 weeks), rainwater harvesting and native bushes and plants, and garden beds. The student leadership team, with support from School Garden Workshop staff, will develop a site plan using this budget to create a model sustainability teaching site. Gardening and field supplies ($1000 CSF, $800 PIF grant) will include dirt, seeds, landscaping tools and tool storage to facilitate ongoing workshops. Dr. DelMar will donate enough landscaping tools for 5 people, 10 large pots, and other gardening supplies. Programming supplies ($1200) will include any food, art, herbal medicine books or things of that nature to also help facilitate ongoing workshops and will be funded out of the PIF grant FY 26 allocation. The new student resource center budget under 3CS will provide the budget for future programming and gardening needs after the 2026 fiscal year. The total requested from CSF comes to $99,900.

Project Feasibility and Logistics

The Campus Sustainability Fund will only fund projects that have completed the necessary work to ensure they can succeed, be completed in the grant's timeline, or have an accurate budget.
Please provide a description of the work that has been completed so far to make this project feasible. Please provide a description of the work that has been completed so far to make this project feasible. If relevant partners have been contacted/coordinated with, please identify them in your response.
For example, have you received consent or authorization to complete your project (such as from Housing and Residence Life, Facilities Management, Parking and Transportation, etc.)? If you are making modifications to

campus, do you have written authorization or official quotes from Facilities Management to accurately identify the cost of labor and supplies?

Response:

When Dr. DelMar first met with Moses Thompson from UA School Garden workshop and his team regarding this project in 2023, their enthusiasm helped shape a proposal involving passive and active water harvesting, stock tank gardening, and native plants. Inspired by their support, Jamaica decided to apply for the annual Sustainability grant. Although she missed the 2023-2024 cycle, she remained committed to the project and began identifying key stakeholders for its development, including those involved in water line adjustments and oleander removal. By March 2024, we held the first MLK Courtyard Concept meeting, marking a significant step forward. The people at the table included: Mark Novak, Landscape Architect, Planning Design & Construction; Sandra Obenour-Dowd, Superintendent, Facilities Management Operation Services; David Munro, Project Manager, Facilities Management Maintenance Services; Chris Stebe, Landscape Architect and Data Steward, Planning Design & Construction; Michael Sestiaga, Landscape Manager, Facilities Management Operation Services; Moses Thompson, Director, UA School Garden Workshop; Caleb Ortega, SGW Program Coordinator; Yasmine Harbin, AASA student worker and freshman, Landscape Architecture major. In April 2024 we had renderings for the concept and in May 2024, we had a formal Budgetary Estimate from UA Facilities Management Renovation Services Department. Everyone involved seemed to believe in the vision and agreed this was a worthwhile project. As of January 2025, Mark Novak has retired, and Jamaica's student lead Yasmine was unable to return for spring 2025 semester due to an unpaid balance from fall 2024. Yet, this project still has the support from others on the original team, along with identified students who are ready to make this dream a reality. Working with members of the UA School Garden Workshop, Facilities Management Grounds Services, Renovation Services, Campus Community Connection and Success (3CS, FKA the Office of Diversity and Inclusion which housed Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement aka the 7 cultural and resource centers), and the student project team will make this project a fun and exciting one as everyone is on board with the vision of a Seeds of Resilience Courtyard at the MLK Jr Building.

Environmental Sustainability Outcomes

Please provide a description of how you expect your project to advance environmental sustainability on campus. A definition of environmental sustainability is provided on our Guides and Tips page.

Response:

This project will advance environmental sustainability on UA's campus in lots of exciting ways! Currently, few buildings on campus are collecting rainwater, either passively or actively; this project will do both. The amphitheater surrounding the native tree will feature semi-permeable pavers, allowing rainwater to return to the earth and water the tree while preventing run-off and soil erosion. From the 1000sq ft roof top of the section of the bldg facing 1st E. St., a 1000gal water harvesting tank will capture potentially, over 7,000 gal of water each year. This will be used to

irrigate the stock tank gardens, reducing reliance on potable water while mitigating run-off and erosion. Someday, we hope the building will install other water tanks on other sides of the building to maximize the water-saving potential and further contribute to campus-wide sustainability goals. Rainwater harvesting and run off mitigation also improve soil health and integrity, and given the building's proximity to E. 1st St., reducing run off will help prevent flooding and minimize ground-source pollution. By reducing the runoff, the project is expected to prevent an estimated 1,500 gallons of stormwater from contributing to flooding during major rain events, helping to protect the local ecosystem. Planting native species, including drought-tolerant plants and a shade-providing native tree will be prioritized in order to establish a thriving ecosystem. These plants will attract native pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds, and support beneficial insects that are essential to a healthy garden. Creating a microclimate with increased vegetation is also expected to reduce surface temperatures in the courtyard by up to 10°F, mitigating the urban heat island effect caused by the nearby parking lot and street. Increased vegetation will improve air quality by filtering pollutants and producing oxygen, contributing to a healthier and more comfortable space for students and visitors. Sustainability practices like composting and sustainable soil management will further enhance the courtyard's environmental impact. Jamaica is hoping that the future student resource center will incorporate food composting practices, and the project team will plan on composting organic matter from the garden. This way, the project can reduce waste by diverting up to 200lbs of food and yard waste annually from landfills while creating nutrient-rich soil amendments for the garden. Educational programming in the courtyard will showcase the benefits of water harvesting, native planting, and sustainable gardening to the community. Visitors will gain practical insights into adopting eco-friendly behaviors, helping to create a culture of sustainability on campus. By transforming this underutilized space into a vibrant, biodiverse, functional green space, the courtyard will serve as a model for environmental sustainability.

Social Sustainability Outcomes

Please provide a description of how you expect your project to advance social sustainability on campus. A definition of social sustainability is provided on our Guides and Tips page.

Response:

The Seeds of Resilience Courtyard directly addresses systemic inequities by creating a green space designed with the needs of Black/Brown students in mind. As research shows, access to resources like green spaces, healthy foods, and clean air plays a critical role in individual and community well-being. However, historic practices such as redlining have disproportionately denied Black and Brown communities' access to these essential resources. AASA had long been dedicated to advocating for the success of Black students, recognizing that success in the U.S. is often predicated on access to opportunities that many Black and Brown students have historically been excluded from. This courtyard aims to be a counterbalance to these disparities—a green space on campus where students can experience not only environmental beauty but also the benefits of cultural and educational programming that connects them to sustainability, healing, and community. This courtyard will ensure accessibility for all students, including those with mobility aids, by incorporating features like raised gardening beds and accessible pathways. This ensures no one is excluded from participating in or benefiting from the space. By integrating traditional farming

practices, African herbal medicine and foods, and connections between African and Indigenous cultures, the courtyard places Black and Brown histories at the center of its story, providing a space where these narratives are honored and amplified. Student leaders, including those from historically underrepresented backgrounds, will be instrumental in shaping the space, fostering a sense of ownership and agency. The courtyard serves as a reminder of the intersection between environmental and social resilience. It provides a platform for conversations about how structural inequalities (such as food deserts, lack of green spaces, and disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards) impact Black and Brown communities. Programming in space will equip students with tools and knowledge to advocate for change. The project emphasizes the importance of collective care—of the land, the space, and one another—as a means of building resilience within marginalized communities. The courtyard serves as a visible example of what equity looks like in practice. It reflects UA's commitment to creating spaces that prioritize the well-being of underrepresented students and directly address systemic inequities. Through programming and outreach, the courtyard will educate the campus community about the historical and current disparities Black and Brown communities face, inspiring more inclusive and equitable approaches to sustainability and community building. By placing equity in action at its core, the Seeds of Resilience Courtyard becomes more than just a physical space, it becomes a statement about what is possible when we center resilience, inclusion, and sustainability in our vision for the future.

Student Leadership & Involvement

Please provide a description of how your project will benefit students on campus regarding the creation of leadership opportunities or student engagement. What leadership opportunities exist within your proposal? If you plan to seek student involvement, include relevant details thoroughly and how you will solicit/ market these opportunities.

Response:

We are thrilled to engage students passionate about sustainability in this exciting project! For Jordan, who is deeply connected to the MLK Jr. building and understands the history, this project offers an incredible opportunity to exercise his leadership and creativity in a way that will leave a legacy for students and the broader campus community. He is a current Architecture Engineering major with a minor in Sustainable Built Systems, and will offer a unique perspective on sustainable design. As a member of a historically Black fraternity, his involvement reflects a meaningful connection to the cultural significance of space. Marnesha, a PhD student in Entomology, is deeply passionate about the environment and its intricate ecosystems. Her work with LLC students through AASA and her expertise in entomology will bring valuable insight into designing a space that supports pollinators and biodiversity. Together, these two students represent a powerful and diverse team that embody academic excellence, cultural awareness, and a shared commitment to sustainability. I'm especially excited about the collaboration between these students and the UA School Garden Workshop team. This partnership will not only help design and execute the courtyard but also empower the students to take ownership of a space that reflects their values and vision for environmental and cultural resilience. Their combined expertise and perspectives will make this a truly impactful and inspiring project.

Education, Outreach, and Behavior Change

What opportunities does this project provide for members of the campus/community to learn about sustainability? How will your project educate the campus community and/or incorporate outreach and behavior change, particularly those who are not currently engaged with sustainability or environmental work? Please provide a description of how you expect your project will communicate its impacts to the campus community.

Response:

The Seeds of Resilience Courtyard provides a unique opportunity to immerse the campus and surrounding community in sustainability through the lens of cultural relevance, ecological awareness, and hands-on practices. By connecting participants to the Sonoran Desert using native plants, water harvesting, and desert-adapted gardening techniques, we foster a deeper sense of belonging and understanding of the environment where we live. Workshops and programs may incorporate traditional farming practices and traditional African herbal medicine, bridging ancestral knowledge with modern sustainability practices. Dr. Dotson will lend his expertise around traditional African food systems by helping to plan culinary demonstrations and events will highlight the use of desert-adapted crops and African heritage plants, showcasing their role in food systems and sustainability. The space will serve as a platform to explore and celebrate the historical and cultural ties between Africa and the Americas, fostering connections among participants through shared stories and traditions. The project is designed to engage those who might not currently see themselves in sustainability efforts by proving culturally rooted programming. For example, the integration of African farming practices, traditional herbal medicine, and culinary events makes sustainability relatable and personal, particularly for Black and Brown students. Providing interactive and inclusive spaces like amphitheater seating and accessible gardening beds provide inviting spaces for dialogue, hands-on learning, and participation from all members of the community. A space for events and discussions in the courtyard will connect environmental sustainability to issues of equity and resilience, making these topics accessible to a wider audience. To communicate the impact of the Seeds of Resilience Courtyard, we will use signage and educational displays such as on-site interpretive signs that will highlight sustainable features, cultural elements, and the connections between the Sonoran Desert and African farming practices. Through social media we'll share progress updates, event invitations, and stories about the cultural and environmental significance of the courtyard. Milestone events such as planting ceremonies, culinary showcases, and storytelling gatherings will invite community participation and celebrate space's evolving role. Partnerships with university courses in sustainability, anthropology, public health, and cultural studies will bring students into space for experiential learning. Through these efforts, the Seeds of Resilience Courtyard will root students in the desert, connect them to cultural practices, and inspire behavior change by showing that sustainability is not just a science, but a lived experience deeply connected to identity, community, and place.