UW Campus Sustainability Fund

Letter of Intent

Projects - Cycle 1

Project Title: SER-UW Native Plant Nursery - Cultivating Careers with Supportive Funding

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**Summary of Project Proposal**:

The Society for Ecological Restoration-UW Native Plant Nursery provides high-quality, local, sustainably grown native plants to the UW community. We work with UW undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of capacities and provide a unique educational experience that goes beyond the scope of the typical UW experience. The nursery provides an invaluable addition to students’ academic journey through programs such as our for-credit undergraduate internship, our partnerships with the Community Engagement & Leadership Education Center and the UW-Restoration Ecology Network (REN) Capstone program, and by hosting tours and providing resources for UW classes (such as ESRM/ENVIR 362 and ESRM 412).

The SER-UW Native Plant Nursery seeks **$66,250** in supportive funding to aid in routine administrative costs and infrastructure repairs, as well as to enhance our basic infrastructure and expand our keystone programs. This funding would be administered over 3 years, ensuring the SER-UW Native Plant Nursery and its flagship programming’s stability and success.

The nursery operations are overseen by a full time AmeriCorps member and a paid, undergraduate student assistant. TheAmeriCorps member serves as the Nursery Manager, and is essential to all facets of its success. The undergraduate student assistant gains leadership experience along with professional development as a budding horticulturist. We are requesting $51,000 to provide partial **staff funding** for these positions. Securing partial support for three years will allow the team to focus their time and energy towards furthering our nursery’s mission and enhancing our students' educational experiences. The remainder of the staff funding will be secured through plant sales, external grants, etc.

Each quarter, the SER-UW Native Plant Nursery hosts at least five UW undergraduate interns. These interns earn credit toward their degree and produce individual, hands-on projects that are published on the [nursery website](https://sites.uw.edu/seruwnursery/) and displayed at the Miller Library Student Plant Research Exhibit. We would like to enhance the intern experience and quality of the projects by providing **project/research funding**. By providing a $100 project budget to each intern, the scope of each intern’s individual project can be exponentially expanded and those credits will have even more meaning.

We also seek support for a short-list of priority **infrastructure improvements and repairs**. Our primary facility, an outdoor hoophouse, does not have access to electricity. Solar panels and associated batteries would provide a sustainable source of lighting and enable us to no longer be limited by short winter days. Further, our facilities are largely unmarked and thus underappreciated. We seek funding for navigational and educational signage to support self-guided tours of our facilities. In regards to repairs, we are due to replace our hoophouse polycover (wintertime plant protection) and shade cloth (summertime plant protection). Our facilities also need a handful of general repairs, mainly irrigation hoses and rabbit fencing, which are important to plant production.

Each of the items listed in our budget will increase our ability to meaningfully engage UW students in ecological horticulture, supporting their environmental education and building tangible horticultural career skills.

**Project Criteria**

1. **Sustainable Impact***:* *Projects must improve the sustainability of UW’s campus and/or operations. Sustainable impact encompasses both social sustainability - cultural awareness & preservation, representation or engagement of underrepresented communities, diverse and interdisciplinary collaboration – and environmental sustainability – reducing carbon emissions, energy use, water use, waste, pollutants, and toxins, as well as improving living systems, biodiversity, environmental justice and equity. Projects focused on social sustainability should also include an environmentally sustainable component, although this part does not have to be the project’s focus.*

Our student assistant and AmeriCorps member are critical to the nursery’s keystone role in ecological restoration on the university campus. Our nursery leads the production and procurement of native plants for contracts and orders with the SER-UW student organization and REN Capstone restoration sites, and supports UW Grounds. Nursery practices, including sexual propagation and integrated pest management, support principles of ecological horticulture, preserving biodiversity and fostering plant-wildlife interactions on campus. These practices cannot be sustained without relationships built with the broader restoration community on campus and in King County, including student organizations, student volunteers, faculty, other nurseries, and interested community members. These relationships are primarily and critically supported by, and cannot be expanded without funding longevity and staff stability through our student assistant and AmeriCorps member.

1. **Leadership & Student Involvement:** *Staff and student roles must be clearly outlined and reflected in the proposed project budget. Projects must demonstrate some substantial degree of student leadership or student involvement throughout the application and implementation process to be considered for funding. Additionally, projects initiated by students will be prioritized.*

The nursery provides multiple avenues for student leadership and development. Our internship intentionally fosters leadership, with each intern undertaking a project of a topic of their own initiative, often having interns reaching out and collaborating or networking with, for example, other labs for guidance on research focused projects, or other nurseries for industry knowledge. Often, interns will stay for multiple quarters, allowing for expansion of responsibilities and peer teaching–a cornerstone to maintaining operations. Our student assistant position provides an opportunity for high-level student involvement and leadership on grant-funded research, horticultural operations, key partnerships with other organizations, and management of interns and volunteers.

1. **Education, Outreach, & Behavior Change**: *Projects must include educational and outreach components that help cultivate an aware and engaged campus community.*

Our Nursery Internship offers UW undergraduates the opportunity to gain hands-on horticultural education while earning credit towards their degree. This unique experience is supported by our AmeriCorps member, who acts both as a nursery manager and an environmental educator. For several of our current/recent interns, their Nursery Internship project is their first experience with leading a research initiative. The requested funding for individual projects will also enhance the internship program by expanding the scope of the research interns may pursue.

1. **Feasibility & Accountability***:* *Applicants must demonstrate that they have or can attain the technical knowledge, necessary approvals, and project management skills to complete projects successfully. The Fund encourages the use of a faculty or staff mentor, appropriate department support, and/or a line item in the budget for project management. CSF monies must be used in a socially responsible manner—to be determined by the Committee. Projects requiring ongoing maintenance or staffing not funded by the CSF should demonstrate a plan to meet long-term needs.*

The SER-UW Native Plant Nursery’s success and longevity is stewarded by SEFS professor Jon Bakker and is supported by the UW Botanic Gardens. Project management is the responsibility of the full time AmeriCorps member and is supported by the student assistant. The nursery can seek further technical knowledge and necessary approvals through existing communication channels at the Center for Urban Horticulture, including the UW Farm, or within the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences. Upon approval of the LOI, we intend to seek technical support for UW Solar as well. Our nursery has successfully completed three large CSF projects in the past and our key stakeholders are familiar with the process via other CSF funded projects.

**Core Project Team**

Jon Bakker (jbakker@uw.edu) - Faculty Advisor

Lea Dyga (dygalea@uw.edu) - Nursery Manager

Joshua Kim (jkim07@uw.edu) - Student Assistant

**Key Stakeholders**

Society for Ecological Restoration UW Student Organization

UW School of Environmental and Forest Sciences

UW Terrestrial Restoration Ecology Lab

UW Restoration Ecology Network Capstone Class

UW Botanic Gardens

UW Solar (upon successful LOI)

| **Itemized Budget - Initial Estimation**  |
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| AmeriCorps Member (Full Time, 1700 hours/year) - Staff  | $9,000 x 3 years | $27,000 |
| Student Assistant (Part Time, 3 quarters/year) - Staff  | $8,000 x 3 years  | $24,000 |
| Internship Project Funding (5 interns/quarter @ $100 each) | $500 x 10 quarters | $5,000 |
| Hoophouse Lighting (Solar Panels, Batteries, Lights) - Infrastructure Improvement  |  | $8,500  |
| Navigational/ Educational Signage - Infrastructure Improvement  |  | $750  |
| Hoophouse Polycover + Shade Cloth - Infrastructure Repair |  | $500 |
| General Repair Supplies - Infrastructure Repair  |  | $500  |
| TOTAL  |  | $66,250 |

| **Timeline for Project Completion [Spring 2024 through Spring 2027]** |
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| Spring 2024 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
* Hire 2024/25 AmeriCorps Member ($9,000)
* Hire 2024/25 Student Assistant ($8,000)
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| Summer 2024 | * Complete Hoophouse Shade Cloth Infrastructure Repair ($250)
* Complete General Infrastructure Repair ($500)
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| Fall 2024 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
* Research hoophouse lighting (ask UW Solar & UW Farm)
* Begin drafting Navigational/ Educational Signage
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| Winter 2025 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
* Finalize Educational Signage
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| Spring 2025 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
* Finalize hoophouse lighting plan
* Print + Instal Navigational/ Educational Signage ($750)
* Hire 2025/26 AmeriCorps Member ($9,000)
* Hire 2025/26 Student Assistant ($8,000)
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| Summer 2025 | * Begin installing Hoophouse Lighting Infrastructure Improvement ($8,500)
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| Fall 2025 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
* Finalize Hoophouse Lighting Infrastructure Improvement
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| Winter 2026 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
* Complete Hoophouse Polycover Infrastructure Repair ($250)
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| Spring 2026 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
* Hire 2026/27 AmeriCorps Member ($9,000)
* Hire 2026/27 Student Assistant ($8,000)
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| Summer 2026 |  |
| Fall 2026 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
 |
| Winter 2027 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
 |
| Spring 2027 | * Fund 5 Nursery Intern projects ($500)
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