



Volunteer Onboarding Packet



INDEX

Table of Contents



Background.....	3
Mission and Values of the Company.....	4
Programs.....	6
Volunteer Policies and Code of Conduct.....	8
Volunteer Health, Safety, and Attire Tips.....	10
Conclusion.....	11

BACKGROUND

Grow Jackson



I first conceptualized Grow Jackson with a few other young people from Jackson in the fall of 2020. A large portion of the groundwork for the organization was completed from my laptop while living in an Airbnb in Oaxaca de Juarez, Mexico. Upon our formal organization, I terminated my lease and moved back to Jackson to begin laying the foundation for a community grassroots organization. The catalyst for Grow Jackson came from an Environmental Politics class I took at the University of Michigan that changed my life and led to the current organization. It was my first thought about environmental justice or food justice.

In our first season, during the summer of 2021, we planted two gardens, The St. Mary's and Martin Luther King Jr. Recreation Center Community Gardens. We ran summer programs with the City of Jackson and learned a lot, including that spreading 80 yards of manure compost on a neighborhood lot was not the best way to build community support for a new organization. In 2022, we added the Tomlinson St. garden and dramatically expanded our food production. This allowed us to reorient the layout of the St. Mary's and MLK Jr. Rec Center gardens in a better way that is geared towards youth engagement and student interaction. We also added gardens at Andy's Place and Rise Above.

Realizing the success of school gardening at St. Mary's, we piloted a school garden at Northeast Elementary in the Spring of 2023. This program was an overwhelming success and resulted in five additional gardens at other JPS Elementary Schools later that fall. 2023 also brought about the addition of two more community gardens and a community orchard in the King Center garden.

Jacob Inosencio
Founder and Executive Director

Mission, Vision, and Values of the Company

Mission

Grow Jackson's mission is to empower the community through gardens, fresh food access, and education.

Vision

Our vision is to live in a socially just community free of food insecurity, with robust access to fresh food, nutrition, education, and economic security for all people.



Values

Authentic Community Partnerships

This means we will build and maintain trust with grassroots partners, nonprofits, local government, schools, and other programming partners. Most importantly, we will develop and maintain trust with the students and community members we serve daily. We are in a sacred partnership with the people we teach and share food with. Grow Jackson is not here to save anyone but to build community and authentically serve, teach, and learn alongside our neighbors.

Racial and Social Justice

Every day, we strive to increase the accessibility of fresh food to improve economic security and build an equitable community. Injustice in any form threatens this work, and our decision-making process will always be informed by considering how it impacts the fabric of equitable access to justice in Jackson. Our teaching practices, land use, and business management practices will prioritize supporting, centering, and empowering historically marginalized classes and communities.



Food Justice

Access to food is a fundamental human right. Fresh food access is essential to strong communities and strong families. It drives health, education, workforce, and economic outcomes. Without high-quality food, enough to eat, and robust nutrition, students, seniors, and the people of Jackson cannot achieve their best selves.



Equity Centered Decision-Making

From our board of directors and staff to our garden locations to our relationships with other nonprofit organizations, we will always think about how we can push for equitable access and equitable outcomes for our community when we make decisions. Whether it is our responsible financial management ensuring the longevity of our programming, to intentional hiring, board development, and program partner selection; we will consider our decisions with as many stakeholders in mind as much as possible.

Environmental Sustainability

Without a sustainable and environmentally responsible food system, there is no possibility for long-term fresh food access across the globe. By beginning those practices in our gardens, we advocate for practices that cherish the soil and plant life. Grow Jackson will always use organic practices, including limited use of organic fertilizers, and hold sacred the relationship we have as people for the rest of our lives in the gardens. We will save food, share our abundance, and consistently promote good gardening practices for the Earth.

Programs

Nutrition Program

Grow Jackson's nutrition program is dedicated to increasing food security and promoting healthy living for Jackson residents through accessible and community-centered initiatives. The program hosts regular grocery giveaways, providing fresh produce and essential food items to families in need, and offers nutrition education events that empower participants with the knowledge to make informed, health-conscious food choices. Community dinners unite residents, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose around nutritious meals. In 2025, Grow Jackson plans to expand its impact by collaborating with the South Michigan Food Bank, supporting mobile markets to reach underserved neighborhoods, and enhancing access to healthy food. In 2024, this program provided over 500 families with groceries, and 200 people with dinner and engaged over 1,000 people in Jackson around their nutrition needs.



Community Garden Program

Grow Jackson's Community Garden Program is a cornerstone of its mission to provide fresh, nutritious food to the Jackson community while fostering connection and engagement across diverse populations. Producing thousands of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables annually, the gardens offer a sustainable food source for residents and create vibrant spaces for learning, healing, and growth. The program actively engages seniors, youth from local centers and summer camps, individuals in mental health recovery, people living with substance use recovery, justice-impacted individuals, and families and community members who live near the garden sites. These inclusive spaces promote gardening and healthy eating skills while cultivating a sense of community pride and empowerment. By bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds, Grow Jackson's gardens transform food access while nurturing a stronger, more resilient community.

School Garden Program

Grow Jackson's School Garden Program reaches over 1,500 students across Jackson Public, Jackson Catholic, Western, Northwest, and Rise Above schools, embedding agriculture and environmental literacy into classrooms from kindergarten through 12th grade. Through engaging, hands-on learning in over 50 classrooms, students experience a dynamic, science-based curriculum that complements their regular studies, equipping them with gardening, sustainability, and food production skills. Students gain a practical understanding of healthy eating and local food systems by actively growing food for themselves and their community. With more than 85% of participating students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, the program is vital in enriching educational experiences while addressing food insecurity and fostering self-reliance in Jackson's youth.



Workforce Development Program

The Grow Jackson Workforce Development Program offers a transformative 10-week paid internship for at-risk high school students and recent graduates, providing them with valuable work experience, leadership development, and meaningful community engagement. This seasonal internship is designed to give interns hands-on training in urban agriculture and equip them with essential life and professional skills. Alongside daily work, interns receive financial literacy education, resume-building support, and training in soft skills that will benefit them in any career path they pursue. Each intern also completes an environmental literacy pre-apprenticeship, building a foundation in sustainable practices that enhances their understanding of ecological responsibility. Through this program, Grow Jackson empowers young people with the skills, confidence, and knowledge needed to succeed in the workforce and become active, informed community members. In 2025, Grow Jackson will expand the program to hire ten interns from the Jackson area.

Volunteer Policies and Code of Conduct

1. INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN

No One-on-One Situations: Volunteers must never be alone with a child. Always ensure another adult is present.

No Physical Contact: Do not touch children under any circumstances, including physical discipline, gestures of affection, or any other physical interaction.

Appropriate Behavior: Always conduct yourself with kindness and professionalism. Please don't use inappropriate language or behavior in front of children.



2. INTERACTIONS WITH GARDEN NEIGHBORS

Sharing Produce: Grow Jackson values building positive relationships with the community. Whenever possible, share garden produce with neighbors.

Handling Complaints: If a neighbor has a concern or complaint, please don't try to resolve it alone.

Instead:

Please direct them to the Grow Jackson staff member on-site

OR

Provide the Executive Director's contact information:

Jacob Inosencio

Email: jacob@growjackson.org

Phone: (517) 745-9805

3. EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

In the event of an emergency, follow these steps:

Notify a Grow Jackson Employee: As soon as possible, inform a GJ staff member on site unless it is clearly a medical emergency requiring immediate action.

GJ Employee Assesses and Responds: The staff member assesses the situation and determines whether to contact 911. If necessary, they make the call.

Executive Director Notification: The staff member will notify the Executive Director of the situation.

Basic First Aid

A robust first aid kit is available on-site and can be used for minor injuries such as cuts, scrapes, or insect bites.

If you're unsure how to provide basic first aid, ask a GJ staff member for assistance.

Do not administer first aid beyond basic care unless you are trained to do so.

4. GENERAL CONDUCT

Respect and Inclusivity: Treat everyone—fellow volunteers, staff, community members, and garden neighbors—with respect and kindness. Grow Jackson is a space for inclusivity and collaboration.

Professionalism: Represent Grow Jackson in a positive light by being courteous, reliable, and mindful of your actions and words.

Safety First: Follow all safety guidelines provided during training or by staff on site.

5. REPORTING CONCERNS

If you witness or experience inappropriate behavior, unsafe conditions, or other concerns while volunteering, please report it to the Grow Jackson staff member on-site or contact the Executive Director.

By Adhering to these policies, you help ensure that Grow Jackson remains a safe, respectful, and vibrant organization for all. Thank you for your commitment to our mission and your dedication to creating positive change in our community!



Volunteer Health, Safety, and Attire

VOLUNTEERING IN THE GARDEN CAN BE PHYSICALLY DEMANDING, SO IT'S ESSENTIAL TO DRESS APPROPRIATELY AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF WHILE ON-SITE. PLEASE KEEP THE FOLLOWING TIPS IN MIND TO ENSURE A SAFE AND ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE:

1. Dress for the Garden

Wear Layers: Weather conditions can change throughout the day. Dressing in layers allows you to stay comfortable in fluctuating temperatures.

Comfortable, Durable Clothing: Choose clothes that can get dirty and protect you from scratches or debris. Long sleeves and pants are ideal for extra protection.

Sturdy Footwear: Wear closed-toe shoes with good support to prevent injuries and ensure stability on uneven ground.

Sunscreen and Hats: Protect yourself from the sun by applying sunscreen and wearing a wide-brimmed hat or cap.

2. Stay Hydrated and Energized

Bring Snacks and Water: While some snacks and water may be provided, it's a good idea to bring your own reusable water bottle and snacks to keep your energy levels up.

Take Breaks: Listen to your body and take frequent breaks, especially during hot weather. Rest in shaded areas when needed.



3. Plan for Outdoor Conditions

Bug Protection: Use insect repellent to ward off mosquitoes and other pests.

Rain Gear: Bring a waterproof jacket or poncho if rain is expected.

BY FOLLOWING THESE TIPS, YOU'LL BE BETTER PREPARED TO ENJOY VOLUNTEERING IN THE GARDEN WHILE STAYING SAFE AND COMFORTABLE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO GROW JACKSON'S MISSION!

Grow Jackson

Growing Food, Feeding Jackson