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**Philanthropy**

# Grant-getting curriculum prepares students for work force

By focusing on nonprofits, kids learn useful business, community skills

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Kelly Johnson](#) Staff writer

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Wyatt Brown is confident in his ability to evaluate which community grant applications deserve funding, and doesn't back away from heated debates with fellow board members in making his case.

Mina Phan and her project team recently received funding from the board. They are gratified their proposal and budget were convincing, especially after they studied up on their grant-writing skills. Now they're starting to implement their project, which will educate the community on how bats benefit the environment.

In the nonprofit world, the cycle of requesting grant money and awarding funds is the norm.



Dennis McCoy | Sacramento Business Journal

Students from Grant High School's GEO Academy work in the school's urban garden. The academy has a GABY grant that allows them to teach younger students how to grow and cook their own food, and how organic practices help the environment.

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But there's nothing everyday about the role Brown and Phan are playing in the philanthropy world. Both the grant giver and the recipient are high school students. They're part of an innovative Sacramento program that teaches and enthuses young people about philanthropy, provides small grants of up to \$500 for youth-led projects, and along the way, helps kids develop analytical thinking, leadership and budget-setting skills that will help them later as workers and consumers.

**Nonprofits 2.0**

The program is known as GABY, short for **Grants Advisory Board for Youth**. The **Sacramento Region Community Foundation** runs Sacramento GABY, with primary funding from the Sierra **Health Foundation**. This year the foundation is seeking support from businesses too, both through donations of dollars and time.

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Also this year, Sacramento GABY has deepened its reach by incorporating an e-learning platform. GABY 2.0 uses social media such as videos and blogs plus games and quizzes to better engage youth, more easily share information, and gauge students' understanding of philanthropy and of this year's focus — the environment. Before, the Sacramento Region Community Foundation handed out a manual to grant applicants and hoped they'd read it.

The grant proposals were better thought out this year, board member Brown said, and the applicants — they can range in age from 10 to 19 — demonstrated a clearer understanding of how their project would give back to the community. He attributes that change to the e-learning modules.

“Kids love interactive lessons,” said Heidi Haugen, a **Florin High School** agricultural technology academy teacher who uses GABY's lessons in her classes. Phan, 16, and her classmates who received GABY funding for the bat project are in Haugen's class.

Gurleen Singh, a **GABY board** member and sophomore from Folsom, felt like a rock star last month when applicants made their pitch to the board for funding. Some applicants appeared star struck upon seeing Singh because she's on one of the GABY instructional videos online.

“It plays to the whole new wave of technology these kids are exposed to,” said Elaine Abelaye, executive director of **Asian Resources Inc.**, a work force development nonprofit that is working with GABY grant recipients from **Hiram Johnson High School**.

Abelaye is enthusiastic about the skills these students are learning, skills they can use in their lives now as well as when they join the work force in Sacramento. “They're going to understand research, networking, how to develop a budget,” she said. They'll also gain an appreciation for giving back to the community, a value she hopes they'll keep for life.

Nicole Thompson, 17, another bat project participant, wants to be a veterinarian, both for the rich and poor. Now she knows how to apply for grants for that clinic she'd like to open, she said.

“These are our future leaders,” said Craig McNamara, a Winters walnut grower. It is “absolutely essential to the future success of our community” for nonprofits and businesses to become “engaged in the next generation of decision makers and leaders.”

McNamara is founder of the Center for Land-Based Learning. Phan and her Florin classmates working on the bat project are active in McNamara's nonprofit.

In their “Going Batty” project, the students will make bat boxes and donate them to two elementary schools. They'll also make a bat-box-shaped pinata containing bat goodies and treats to include in a presentation on bats to younger kids.

GABY board members and grant recipients gain skills — including becoming more computer literate with GABY 2.0 — that will make them more marketable once they're ready to stick their foot in the work force. With this year's focus on environmental issues, they'll also be more prepared to fill all the green jobs of the future, said Yumi Sera, who runs the program for the Sacramento Region Community Foundation.

“GABY gives them an opportunity to build up their skills and their résumé while we wait for the market to turn around,” Abelaye said.

#### ‘It's not about the grant’

Sacramento GABY was created in 2002 at the urging of Sacramento philanthropist Marcy Friedman, a former board member of the foundation. A regional nonprofit called **Great Valley Center** and its consultants developed the youth grant-making board program. Sacramento was one of four cities nationwide to implement it.

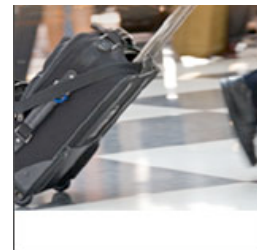
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Last year, community foundations in Placer and El Dorado counties used Sacramento’s model to create their own GABY programs.

Now, several area high schools plan to use the Sacramento GABY 2.0 as their community service curriculum, Sera said. And the **Institute for Local Government** in Sacramento wants to use it for its youth commissions, she said.

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