Oasis Detroit
An oasis is a fertile spot in a desert where refreshment and nourishment are found. In 2020, I decided I no longer wanted to stand by and watch my neighborhood suffer due to skyrocketing houselessness and extreme hunger, a byproduct of Covid-19. With the help of other local nonprofits and my city council members, I launched Oasis Detroit, a community fridge and pantry dedicated to hunger and education. Much of urban Detroit is a food desert. A food desert is an area where access to affordable and fresh food is severely limited. As the coronavirus outbreak ran rampant through Detroit, many homeless shelters within a 25-mile radius of my zip code paused intake to manage potential outbreaks. While the pause made sense and was consistent with the universal “pause” the entire world faced during 2020, it left many people out on the street in need of meals.

Scope of Detroit’s Growing Food Problem
Near my home, three local stores sold groceries, yet my mom purposefully passed them on our way to the big chain grocery store in the neighboring suburb of Southfield. It took us twenty-three minutes to travel by car to the closest Meijer. Why did we pass the Save-a-lot that was five minutes away? Why did we pass the local liquor store that also sold groceries and fresh milk? As I got older, my mother explained to me that local stores had extreme prices for low-quality food. This is the reality for those who live in a food desert and lack the time and/or resources to travel to the suburbs for fresh food at a decent price.

Summer Expansion
Although Oasis has helped many in such a short period, one of the largest components of my vision was to build community. I want Oasis to be a source of food and support and a place where relationships can grow and thrive. I want to cultivate long-term connections to those who frequent the refrigerator. I have struggled with this part of my dream because Oasis is just a refrigerator on an empty lot. This summer, I propose to expand Oasis into a community garden.

Vision for Community Garden
A community garden is a space where the community comes together to cultivate land and crops for everyone’s gain. This expansion will bridge the gap between Oasis as merely a resource and its potential as a place of community bonding. I plan to use the crops we grow to folks who are sick or shut in. I also plan to use them to prepare hot and cold meals for those who are unable to do so themselves. I desire for the garden to be an educational experience for children and adults who have no gardening experience. Lastly, I want to use part of my funding to allocate micro scholarships to local students who commit themselves to helping grow the garden.

I aspire for this garden to also be a source of beauty and pride. Due to bankruptcy, gentrification, and unsafe housing conditions, Detroit has been a hotspot for demolition. The garden is thus an opportunity to offer a breath of fresh air. It can be a source of pride for all who participate and benefit from it. A place where people can come to admire the work of the community coming together to fight against a single goal—food insecurity.

I plan to invest in crops that are known staples in Black and Brown communities, such as potatoes, collard greens, corn, cabbage, avocados, tomatoes, and beans. I also hope to expand the community’s exposure to holistic herbs and spices, such as cinnamon, sage, fenugreek, and echinacea, to promote holistic health practices originally cultivated by our African ancestors.

Daily Schedule of Activities
9 am: Water crops, weeding, picking, realignment of crops
10 am: Community garden opens for the day
11 am: Another round of watering and irrigation
12 pm: Lunch break for volunteers and staff
1 pm: Partner with school children from two orgs, Lively Stones and ARMI, for educational and volunteering opportunities (twice weekly)
2 pm: Another round of pruning, weeding, and routine gardening activities
3 pm: Paperwork, journaling, photography, and official logging done on sight before closing
Oasis Detroit: A Communal Approach to Life in a Food Desert
Michaiah Ligon, Northwestern University
June 5–September 1, 2023
Partners: Lively Stones Community Development, ARMI Ministries
Location: Detroit, MI

4 pm: Clean, lock up of garden, overnight irrigation system started
5 pm: Pick up of volunteered food/seeds, plants from local groceries, stores, community gardens

**Timeline (includes dates before receipt of funding)**

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<tr>
<th>Important Dates</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-February</td>
<td>Appointment with Detroit Land Bank Authority to finalize purchase of lot</td>
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| Mid-March       | ● Ground tested for fertility  
                   ● Plan for ground tilling and crop arrangement to begin planting in 2–3 weeks  
                   ● Lot inspected for source of sustainable water |
| Late April      | Cold season crops begin (e.g., cabbage, broccoli, carrots) |
| Early May       | Warm season planting begins (e.g., corn, onions, beets) |
| Mid-June        | Community garden officially opens |
| Early September | Project wraps up for the summer with a block party and prizes |

**Project Objectives**
The success of my community garden will be measured by its impact on the community and the yield of the crop. I want to provide food to at least 1,000 residents this summer, which is an achievable goal. A secondary goal is to partner with larger organizations to secure funding and resources for the sustainability of the community garden for summers to come. I want to provide up to three microgrants for students in their high school years. And, although this final goal is not quantitatively measurable, I ultimately want to make my community proud and provide a service to those who are overlooked and underrepresented.

**Partner Organizations**
*Lively Stones Community Child Development, Gwen Evans*
Lively Stones is a childcare and early education center in East Village Detroit. Gwen Evans, founder and program director, has an emphasis on partnering with families to raise a child in the way they should go according to biblical principles and standards. She provides care for children of all ages, races, ethnicities, SEC, and religions. We are still working out the details of our partnership for this upcoming summer, but we will collaborate on at least three events.

*Apostolic Renovation Ministries International (ARMI), Apostle Austin Mitchell*
ARMI Ministries is a church located on Detroit’s West Side that is devoted to the growth of both their church community and the community itself. ARMI recently bought and renovated a new building in one of the most historically underfunded and underrepresented neighborhoods in the city. ARMI’s 2023 vision includes partnering with many nonprofits in the city to revitalize the area. ARMI will be providing volunteers, tools, and funding for the community garden this summer.

**Background and Experience**
As a second-year student at Northwestern, I am pursuing a double major in psychology and learning and organizational change, with a minor in business. I am also in the civic engagement certificate program. Through my efforts with Oasis Detroit, I have worked with city, state, and congressional representatives, and I have experience in community organizing through my ongoing work in participatory budgeting in Evanston, IL. Lastly, gardening is near and dear to my heart. My grandmother has been the neighborhood gardener for the last sixty years and has taught me much of her wisdom. I believe a support system is the most important part of a nonprofit organization and organizing in general. Luckily, I have a large extended family and church family who have supported me for the last two years throughout this process.