



PARK AND RECREATION PROFESSIONALS' GUIDE TO FUNDRAISING



People enjoy a waterfront park. Photo courtesy of Steven Shaffer via unsplash.com.

Cover images (clockwise from top left): Park leaders meet to discuss the Hayward Area Shoreline and to present U.S. Representative Eric Swalwell (D-CA) with the NRPA Park Champion Award, at the Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center in California. Photo courtesy of East Bay Regional Park District; Adults participate in an art class at the Sam Johnson Recreation Center in Plano, Texas. Photo courtesy of Kelley Crimmins, Plano Parks and Recreation Department; Summer campers cool off and goof off with their counselors at the South Clayton Recreation Center in Jonesboro, Georgia. Photo courtesy of Clayton County Parks and Recreation.

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GLOSSARY OF FUNDRAISING TERMS

This short list explains some of the terms that are not already defined in the guide. You can access a comprehensive set of fundraising terms at learn.guidestar.org/help/glossary.

501(c)(3)

Organizations operating exclusively for charitable purposes, which have been designated exempt from paying federal taxes by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Community Foundation

A grantmaking public charity dedicated to improving the lives of people in a specific local or regional area.

Corporate Social Responsibility

A term used to describe a company's active interest in how it affects the well-being of society.

IRS Form 990

The tax return required by the IRS for an organization designated as 501(c)(3).

Major Gift

A specific gift level that represents a significant contribution. The level varies by entity, as some established organizations consider gifts over \$100,000 to be major, while others consider gifts of \$1,000 to be a major donation.

Mission Statement

A concise definition of your agency's focus and purpose that describes who you serve and what value you deliver to them.

Naming Right

The right to name a tangible property or an event, usually for a defined period of time, in exchange for a financial commitment.

Types of Funding

Capital funding supports major projects, such as land purchase and/or new construction, expansion, renovation, or replacement for an existing property or facility.

General operating support can be used for an organization's overall activities, including operating expenses and overhead.

Program support is restricted for a specific project or activity of the grantee, tied to specific, project-based outcomes.

Types of Funds

Unrestricted funds have no conditions on the way they can be used.

Restricted funds must be used for the specific purpose for which they are requested and given.

A *permanently restricted gift* is a term used for endowment funds: donated funds that cannot be spent; only a portion of the interest that the endowment fund earns can be used for an unrestricted or restricted purpose.

Vision Statement

An inspirational declaration that creates a picture with words to answer the question: "What do you want to create?"

INTRODUCTION

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of public parks, recreation and conservation. Our work draws national focus to the far-reaching impact of successes generated at the local level. NRPA's members are more than 60,000 strong and represent public spaces in urban communities, rural settings and everything in between. Our members are the park and recreation professionals and advocates who leverage their roles in conservation, health and wellness, and social equity to improve their communities.

Park and recreation professionals are passionate about their jobs. They have meaningful occupations that have significant impacts on local communities, and they can see the influence of their work every day. These professionals not only provide the park and recreation services that people from all walks of life use, but also serve as stewards of the public green spaces that safeguard the environment.

Elected officials expound on the value of parks and recreation, but often do not prioritize it or provide enough funding to run the best operation possible. Parks and recreation survived the Great Recession of 2008–2009, but according to research from NRPA, the sector has not regained the public funding levels that it had prior to that global financial crisis (bit.ly/2WK9zI0). Park and recreation agencies need to be ready for budget reductions due to financial contractions and/or unanticipated disasters.

In order to build and sustain a high-quality park and recreation system, sufficient resources are needed. That means you must consistently advocate for more tax dollars; you may have to raise rates for program participation and space rental; and you can diversify your revenue streams by bringing in other resources, including state and federal grants, in-kind contributions and private funds. You have a wide range of opportunities to secure charitable gifts to leverage public dollars and earned income.

Was “raising money” ever in your job description? How do you do that? How do you even start?

Many people are uncomfortable raising money. It is important to remember that when you ask for investment in a worthwhile purpose, it is a gift not for personal gain, but to benefit your community. You have every right to be proud when asking for support to help the members of the public you serve, and you will win the respect of people who also care about the challenges facing your community and who are in positions to help you.

The public's recognition of the importance of parks and recreation is evolving. People who give money are beginning to understand that parks and recreation can address a host of emerging cross-sector challenges, such as:

- Creating environmentally resilient and sustainable communities
- Advancing diversity, equity and inclusion and challenging historical and systemic inequities
- Creating cross-sector partnerships with health, environmental, housing and other partners for collective impact
- Disaster preparedness, mitigation and response

Now is a good time to join discussions in your jurisdiction about the various issues communities face, which can lead to potential resources to address them through parks and recreation.

There's no one-size-fits-all model for park and recreation fundraising. Some agencies have the capacity to fundraise on their own; others may hire a fundraising consultant or partner with a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. In this guide, we delve into the preparation needed to start a successful fundraising program. We outline the fundraising process. We focus on resource development for programs, because it is likely that this will be a focus of your initial fundraising efforts. We briefly spotlight how park and recreation agencies can work with business entities, conduct special events, and help create an ongoing fundraising enterprise.

Since this brief guide cannot go in depth on all fundraising topics, we provide pointers specifically for the park and recreation sector and refer you to manuals and webinars for more information. The fundraising strategies described here are the same building blocks used by fundraisers for both large and small campaigns.

Before you begin or expand a fundraising program, consider the effort involved. Know that from the start, fundraising involves an investment of resources, takes serious effort, and needs follow-up and more follow-up. If you start out intensely and then abandon the effort when it doesn't seem to "pay off," later you will have difficulty convincing funders that they should support you. An agency might put a lot of effort into preparing a proposal, and, if not awarded a grant, think, "Well, fundraising doesn't work for us." Know that you will hear, "No." Experienced fundraisers interpret "No" to mean "No, for now."

When you are successful in fundraising, it is deeply satisfying, both personally and professionally, because people recognize the importance of your work and support your efforts. Despite inevitable bumps in the road, fundraising can be tremendously impactful for you, your agency and your community.

I. SET UP FOR SUCCESS

Lay this important groundwork before you start to seek funding.

A. ESTABLISH AN INTERNAL FUNDRAISING TEAM

You need both agency leadership and internal support to implement an effective fundraising program. Ideally, the team will include the chief executive, program director, public relations (PR)/marketing director, finance director and a coordinator with excellent communications and organizational skills to manage the fundraising tasks. In some agencies, one or two people may perform most of these roles, or they may be the responsibility of staff in different departments. Below are the roles to incorporate — but remember, your agency or jurisdiction may assign them in a different way.

TIP

Prior to hiring an outside consultant for fundraising assistance, research your state laws that may require the fundraising consultant to register with the state prior to any solicitation activity. It is not considered ethical to compensate fundraising professionals with a commission (a percentage of donations), or funds raised; donors expect that their contributions will be invested solely for the purposes for which they are requested.

The park and recreation agency's director or chief executive officer (CEO) is the authority with whom donors want to interact, because this individual is responsible for achieving their program and philanthropic goals. The park and recreation director/CEO must be committed to the fundraising process and communicate it as a priority for staff.

The program director can identify the gaps in services and can relay the needs of the employees who conduct programs and operate facilities.

The PR/marketing director knows your audience, which is key to answering the often-asked question for every fundraising request: Who do you serve? This individual also collects direct feedback from the public about what facilities and services they want.

The finance director budgets the expenses of expanding an existing program, piloting a new program or adding a new park or facility, as well as the cost of maintaining a program or facility. This individual also can help create a full budget for fundraising purposes, as discussed below.

The fundraising coordinator conducts research on best practices, prepares documents, submits proposals as approved, schedules meetings, and maintains communication loops internally and externally. This individual could be a staff member or an experienced contractor; either must have access to all appropriate parties. The fundraising coordinator must have excellent writing and organizational skills — and be pleasantly persistent.

Coordinating these functions can be challenging due to many reasons, such as conflicting priorities for funding from different parts of government, bureaucracy in decision-making and meeting deadlines. Pulling together a strong team with the expertise needed will help overcome obstacles and move toward fundraising success.

B. ENSURE TRANSPARENCY AND FISCAL INTEGRITY IN THE FUNDRAISING PROCESS

It is critical that you first establish or learn about your local jurisdiction's policies and procedures for accepting and managing grants and donated funds. In some instances, the mayor or other official must approve a grant proposal before it is submitted. In other cases, the city council must vote to accept a grant (which could take a few weeks). Once received, grant-related income and expenses must be segregated into separate accounts in the public finance system for reporting to the funder.

The importance of appropriate financial controls and reporting cannot be overstated, whether you are accepting funds into the public finance system or partnering with a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. You must instill confidence in prospective donors that their funds will be used appropriately and reported with total transparency.

C. CREATE A CULTURE FOR PHILANTHROPY

Many in the development profession now prefer the word “philanthropy” because fundraising is a transactional term.

Based on its Greek roots, the word philanthropy means “love of humankind.” Robert Payton, the first executive director of the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University, described philanthropy as “Voluntary action for the public good.” Donors want to invest in change for the better, but they cannot do it alone. You are in a position to help a donor make impactful “investments” in health and wellness, conservation, and social equity, which are among the most significant challenges that our society faces. Therefore, the best approach to donors is to ask: “How can I help you realize your goals?”

USING VOLUNTEERS

Many of the tasks described in this guide can be supplemented with the help of volunteers, such as high school and university students, recent graduates, interns, current and retired professionals including park and recreation professionals, teachers, library staff, and other community members interested in donating their time. A community college professor could assign a data gathering project or community needs assessment to a class. A volunteer committee of knowledgeable, local healthcare professionals can give input on wellness programs that are lacking in your community and justification for why they are needed. A group of volunteers can implement a fundraising event plan. An experienced, professional fundraiser might provide free guidance to a volunteer grant writer. Forming a volunteer Development Committee is a terrific way to help you identify, cultivate, solicit and maintain relationships with potential donors. All volunteers need support and supervision to make sure that they always appropriately represent you and your agency's work.

Every person who steps on one of your properties is a potential donor. Therefore, everyone in your agency is responsible for fundraising success and needs to embrace their role as a front-line ambassador. Set aside time in every staff meeting to talk about what you do, why you do it and how the community benefits from your work. Quote your mission and vision statements regularly. Encourage your staff to talk with customers about your agency's aspirations (not problems!). They are your eyes and ears and can provide invaluable feedback.

Expressing regular and authentic gratitude not only to donors, but also to customers, volunteers, elected officials, staff and others who support your agency is key to creating a culture for philanthropy. When everyone feels appreciated, they are more willing to stretch their resources — whatever they are — to make your community a better place to live.

ETHICAL FUNDRAISING AND A DONOR'S "RIGHTS"

Ethical practice is imperative to maintain public trust in the fundraising process. Familiarize your team with the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Code of Ethical Standards: afpglobal.org/ethicsmain/code-ethical-standards

AFP was a partner in the development of The Donor Bill of Rights. While not all provisions will apply to public entities, this document will prepare your team to be donor-centric in your fundraising efforts: afpglobal.org/donor-bill-rights

II. DEVELOP YOUR JUSTIFICATION FOR PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT

Prospective donors, especially those capable of making significant contributions, expect in-depth information about your reasons for seeking funding: the community issues that you are addressing, the ways you will address them and the amount it costs. Furthermore, setting your own priorities prevents you from becoming sidetracked by other people's priorities that do not match your own.

A. ASSESS YOUR COMMUNITY'S NEEDS RELATED TO PARKS AND RECREATION

Consider the purpose of your fundraising program. What are the challenges you are addressing? The purpose is not about what the agency needs, which usually is expressed as "We need more staff and more money to do our jobs successfully." This kind of rationale does not work. To be successful in fundraising, you need to flip the narrative and address community needs.

When you gather your fundraising team, your first agenda item is to gather data for community needs relating to parks and recreation. There are many strategies for doing this. Some information may be on-hand, or you can collect information by employing some best practices.

Best Practices for Gathering Data on Community Needs

If you have a park and recreation master plan, you are way ahead! A master plan is developed from a public planning process that is multifaceted, inclusive and comprehensive. Your community has given input, identified gaps in services and facilities, detailed needs, and established priorities. This document is the best tool to position you for successful fundraising. Check out NRPA's resource on Creating Equity-Based System Master Plans (nrpa.org/ParkMasterPlanning).

You also can employ these strategies:

- **Customer Satisfaction Surveys** reveal services and facilities that your customers want. nrpa.org/publications-research/mapping-and-data-resources/customer-feedback-surveys
- **Community Needs Assessment** combines both customer satisfaction and priority-setting. nrpa.org/publications-research/mapping-and-data-resources/community-needs-assessments
- **Community Engagement** enables you to work with community members to identify their priorities and engage them in the fundraising process. nrpa.org/Community-Engagement
- **Asset Mapping** identifies local strengths, such as people, organizations, businesses, services and resources and can reveal ways to connect, leverage and add to existing resources to make communities stronger, providing a positive incentive for investment. ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/rural-toolkit/1/asset-identification and bit.ly/36bBJPk
- **Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)** is a federal requirement for private, nonprofit hospitals. A hospital must complete a CHNA at least every three years with input from the broader community. Hospitals then describe their implementation strategy to meet the identified needs, which could potentially include partnership with parks and recreation. Contact your local, nonprofit hospital for a copy of the report or look up the hospital's IRS Form 990, Schedule H.
- **Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)** provides priorities for public outdoor recreation across cities, rural areas and regions. Each state must prepare a SCORP every five years to be eligible for funding from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals lists all SCORPs on its website, which also features research, webinars and resources. recpro.org/scorp-library

Gathering and Utilizing Other Data

In addition to the above strategies, listen carefully to what people are saying about your community's challenges and acquire backup documentation. Has your health department issued alerts about a prevalence of obesity and/or diabetes? Have your local media cited the number of trees that your community has lost to gradual deforestation or in a recent storm? Are there school report cards that spotlight neighborhoods where students are underperforming and cannot access out-of-school time opportunities? Has your local Council on Aging issued an alarm about the effect of loneliness on the health of your senior citizens?

There also are reports and websites where you can gather community data and rate how your area performs relative to other places. You can use this information to highlight areas in which your community needs to improve. Here are a few examples:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's 500 Cities project provides city and census tract-level data for a number of chronic disease risk factors, health outcomes and clinical preventative service use for the largest 500 cities in the nation. cdc.gov/500cities/index.htm
- The American Fitness Index ranks America's 100 largest cities on a composite of factors contributing to their citizens' fitness, health and quality of life. bit.ly/2zU2kEe
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation produces an annual report on child well-being and tracks demographic, economic, education, health, and safety/risky behaviors by state and county. datacenter.kidscount.org
- You can access comparison data such as Park Metrics, Facility Market Reports and Park Serve at nrpa.org.



Burlington Department of Parks, Recreation and Waterfront professionals lead children in a hands-on activity. Photo courtesy of the National Recreation and Park Association.

B. IDENTIFY PROGRAMS TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS AND DEFINE THEIR OUTCOMES

Your needs assessment should back up your assertions that programs or strategies are needed (based on community data) and wanted by your audience (based on park and recreation master plans, customer satisfaction surveys, community needs assessments, community engagement processes). There are many, many resources for programs and strategies that can address identified health, equity and conservation needs. Start with NRPA's resources: [nrpa.org/Best-Practice-Resources](https://www.nrpa.org/Best-Practice-Resources)

When you develop a program or strategy, describe the beneficial changes that your community members will experience if you are able to implement it. All funders seek positive change, which can be defined as program outcomes:

Outcomes are benefits or changes for individuals or populations during or after participating in program activities. [See the reference to "Excerpts from Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach" in this guide's bibliography, which provides a concise summary and definitions of inputs, activities and outputs that lead to outcomes.]

Funders may require you to demonstrate that you

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Through guided exercise classes and group discussion about healthy eating, participants in our "Get Healthy!" program will develop new skills and knowledge that lead to greater health and wellness.
- Volunteers participating in our Youth Coaching certification program will learn the fundamentals of physical skills development and strategies for dealing with sexual, physical and emotional misconduct, bullying and harassment.
- In our "Ageless Garden," toddlers partner with senior citizens on edible gardening projects and gain social skills, appreciation of nature and scientific knowledge of how food grows.
- In our Commit to Health nutrition education intervention, youth and families will learn about preparing healthy foods and eating five fruits and vegetables each day. The number of participants who report consuming five fruits and vegetables a day at the end of the intervention will increase by 10 percent.

achieved the defined outcomes. In some cases, an evaluation plan has to be developed as part of the proposal; you could ask a nonprofit agency, college or university in your community to work with you to develop it. You also may include a request for an outside evaluator in the budget. Your community foundation can be helpful in locating one.

C. BUDGET PART 1: THE BIG PICTURE

Now that you have become familiar with your community's needs, conducted research on best practices to meet these needs, and settled on a program or expansion, you need to create a budget for how much the program will cost, including the funds you currently have and the amount you need to request from donors to implement the program or improvement.

Approaching donors of any type requires a business approach. Create a consumer-friendly budget for your entire park and recreation agency. Calculate your sources of funds for the park and recreation system and all expenditures in broad categories. A prospective donor will be encouraged to see a diversity of support from various streams:

- Tax dollars — general fund, designated levies
- Earned income — rentals, class fees, events, concessions
- Grants and sponsorships
- Volunteer hours
- Donated goods and services

The last two items noted above are not usually calculated in park and recreation budgets. In-kind contributions of products and services, including volunteer help, can be a huge boost for a fundraising request because they show the commitment of others to the work that you do — and they have real value. Just because money is not exchanged does not mean the item or service is free. Products have prices, so does volunteer time; the value of a volunteer hour is \$25.43. (Get updates at independentsector.org).

Agencies may track volunteer hours because some corporations donate money to them based on their employees' volunteer hours. Some track volunteer hours for high school and college community service programs. If you don't track, you can reasonably estimate how many hours people volunteer. For example, volunteer coaches are "on duty" before, during and after each game in the season, plus during regular practices.

D. BUDGET PART 2: PROGRAM INCOME AND EXPENSE

The Program Budget Template (see the Request for Support box, page 12) guides you to calculate what you have and what you need in order to demonstrate how a relatively modest amount of private funding can close a gap between expenses and existing resources for a program that will benefit your public.

The request should be related to itemized programmatic expenses, not ongoing operations or general

WHICH FUNDING REQUEST IS MORE LIKELY TO SUCCEED?

We need to raise \$10,000 to plant 400 trees next year.

OR

We project a budget of \$30,000 to plant trees next year. We will use \$10,000 of our publicly funded budget for supervision, groundskeeping crews, equipment and volunteer management. We will recruit volunteers from the community to help with planting: we calculate that one volunteer hour at \$25 an hour per tree equals a value of \$6,000. A local gardening store is contributing \$4,000 of tree stakes and mulch to protect the trees during mowing while they grow. We are seeking \$10,000 to buy 400 trees at \$25 per tree.

administrative expenses. Most donors will accept a line item of 8 percent to 20 percent administrative “overhead” or “indirect” costs added to the project’s budget; federal and state grants require a negotiated overhead rate that is based on your agency’s financial records.

Professional staff time can be added to the budget only if the staff member has duties directly related to the program or project. For example, you might add 5 percent of your PR/communications staff member’s annual salary to the budget for a jurisdiction-wide program, in addition to the cost of designing and printing program marketing materials. (You should be prepared to provide details of staff salaries and contractor payments in budgets submitted to funders.) If you are asked to provide a budget narrative, which provides a justification for each line item, you can explain that the salary time is devoted to developing the printed materials, uploading and updating information on the website and distributing the information throughout the year. Do not include fundraising personnel or contractors in the program budget, since fundraising is viewed as an administrative function and part of overhead.

Asking for funds to hire program staff is usually a nonstarter, unless you have an opportunity to request a multi-year grant for a specific program. You may have better luck with a program that uses contractors, such as instructors and evaluators.

E. ASSEMBLE YOUR REQUEST(S) FOR SUPPORT

When you have completed all of the items above (steps A through D), you will have most elements needed to request support. You have identified the specific community needs and the reasons they are important to address. In addition to defining the best kind of program to benefit your community, you also have defined the individual participant outcomes: what benefits or changes you anticipate as a result of participation in the program. Your organizational budget shows all the income and expenses of your park and recreation system, so the donor can see that the monetary request for support is modest relative to the big picture. Your program budget calculates how many individuals you can serve with resources in hand and with the philanthropic contribution. Now, you can demonstrate to prospective donors their “return on investment.”

Supporting Documentation

REQUEST FOR SUPPORT

The basic outline for a request for support looks like this:

- Our mission and vision is [describe mission/vision], and our community is facing [describe challenges] that directly relate to this mission. [Here is our evidence.]
- Our park and recreation system is well-positioned to address these challenges with [describe program]. This program works as evidenced by [list information on findings].
- Our expenses to [implement or expand] the program total \$[total program budget]. Out of \$[total program budget], \$[existing personnel budget] will be supported by public dollars and/or earned income. While we will seek donated supplies, we have budgeted \$[budgeted amount] from the \$[existing supplies budget]. We will use volunteers for a value of \$[volunteer hour value].
- Our fundraising goal for this program is \$[total program budget] minus \$[existing personnel budget] minus \$[existing supplies budget] minus \$[volunteer hour value].
- When we secure these funds, we will be able to increase our services to [number] more people with a program that will result in [outcome].
- As you can see from our organizational budget, a modest investment will have a big impact.

You can edit this information into a one-paragraph summary, which is often required as part of a fundraising request.

You and/or your nonprofit partner should have supporting documentation ready for proposals, such as financial statements, agency and/or nonprofit budgets (previous year, current year, following year), staff organizational charts and human resources policies, IRS determination letter(s), and the most recent IRS Form 990.

Other documents helpful to include in a fundraising package are:

- A brief history of your agency, its successes and/or articles in the press
- An outline of recognition and benefits for major gift donors, such as naming rights, signage and public acknowledgment (Jurisdictions need approved policies for donor/sponsor recognition.)
- A list of past donors and amounts
- Letters of support from leaders, partners and beneficiaries of your services
- A list of your jurisdiction leadership and, if applicable, the Board members of your partner 501(c)(3).

Creating a Funding Menu

You will probably have more than one purpose for which you are seeking funds. This can be advantageous, since a single program will not appeal to all prospective donors. A great approach is to prepare a list of three or more needs with a short description to introduce your investment opportunities, and then ask prospective donors which one(s) they would be interested to learn more about. Here is a sample list:

Outdoor Programs

Spending time outdoors improves mental health, increases physical activity, and enhances academic performance and our ability to focus. We seek to introduce a wide array of outdoor education programs for our youth and their families, such as geocaching, canoeing, fishing, bird watching, survival skills workshops, trail walking, overnight camping and team building activities. These can lead to new interests, healthy lifestyles and an appreciation for nature. Funds are needed to purchase equipment for use by volunteers and staff.

Summer Camps

When school is out of session, families depend on our park and recreation system to provide safe, educational recreation programs during the summer. We serve 4,000 children and youth through partnerships with more than 40 local nonprofit and faith-based agencies, and we provide access to pools, field trips, free meals, specialty programs and special events. Funds are needed to underwrite a free summer camp for children from low-income families who can benefit from summer programs to reduce summer learning loss, to learn life-saving water safety skills (see the water safety skills box on the right) and to implement the Youth Quality Program Assessment to ensure a quality experience for every child.

Ensuring the Safety of Children

WATER SAFETY SKILLS: AN EXAMPLE OF USING RESEARCH TO SUPPORT A REQUEST FOR FUNDS

You can document the compelling need for water safety skills with research from a reliable source — in this case, the CDC:

Drowning ranks fifth among the leading causes of unintentional injury death in the United States. About 1 in 5 people who die from drowning are children 14 and younger. For every child who dies from drowning, another five receive emergency care for nonfatal submersion injuries. ([cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/water-safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html](https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/water-safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html))

Our agency is dedicated to protecting the safety and well-being of all community members. NRPA's Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) program provides comprehensive training on playground safety issues, including hazard identification, equipment specifications, surfacing requirements and risk management methods. Funds are needed to send two staff members to earn this certification and to establish a pool of funds to address safety hazards and make minor improvements, such as replacing a swing set or repairing safety surfacing under play equipment.

Get Fit!

Obesity continues to impact millions of people across the country, leading to higher rates of chronic disease and diminished quality of life. We are partnering with our local public health institute, retired police officers and [list company/other partners] to improve long-term health outcomes for low-income families. We have identified six parks for enhanced security, healthy concession options and family-oriented physical activity classes. Funds are needed for exercise instructors and to market the programs.



People relax on the grass at a park. Photo courtesy of Gunner Ridderstrom via unsplash.com.

III. UNDERSTAND THE FUNDRAISING PROCESS

For successful fundraising, you need to know your audience. Each group of potential donors requires a slightly different approach.

A. TYPES OF FUNDERS

Public funders are primarily government agencies at the federal, state and regional levels that make grants. Examples include the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund and state/regional resources to address critical public safety needs like storm mitigation and public health.

TIP

Amy Collier, MCRP, grants administration specialist for Parks and Neighborhoods in Memphis Tennessee, says, "Foundations might provide funding to public parks and recreation, if they accept an IRS letter of determination that shows that the jurisdiction is a nonprofit, public entity. Local foundations prefer park system-wide projects rather than single parks. We were able to get foundation funding for community engagement for our parks master plan."

There are three main groups of private funders:

- Individuals are the source of 80 percent of giving in the country, through direct gifts and bequests. Individuals are not likely to give money directly to a public park and recreation agency, but they will make donations designated to parks and recreation through a nonprofit partner or parks foundation.
- Foundations, which account for 16 percent of all giving, are set up to donate funds, but competition is fierce, and they are inundated with requests. Foundations request different information in different formats.
- Corporations, which provide 4 percent of the giving pie, participate in philanthropy to demonstrate good corporate citizenship and/or use it as a marketing strategy to connect with their customers.

The major stages of fundraising from any of these donor types are identification, cultivation, solicitation and stewardship.

B. IDENTIFY POTENTIAL DONORS

Prospecting is the practice of listing everyone who may be in a position to support your park and recreation work and then qualifying them as potential donors because 1) they are committed to addressing the same community concerns; 2) they make contributions in your community or region; and 3) they have the capacity to give significant funds.

Start with who you know, such as the people, organizations and companies that have already worked with you. That list includes vendors; park and recreation friends' groups; community, business and social leaders; individuals who rent your facilities; and volunteers for youth sports, events and conservation/beautification projects. Research websites of other local organizations that have missions that intersect with parks and recreation and add their major donors to your prospect list.

NRPA shares grant opportunities and resources at nrpa.org/Grants. It also has two tools to help you research and qualify donors, including foundation and government grant opportunities:

- Guide to Raising Additional Funds for Your Park Agency (bit.ly/2Bc4Eaw)
- Prospective Funder Brief (bit.ly/2M3TSp0)

C. CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROSPECTIVE DONORS

Cultivation is the process of developing a strong relationship with your prospective donor, understanding the donor's interests and determining if their interests intersect with yours. Do not leap from identification of a donor to solicitation (asking for money) — take time to build a relationship of trust and respect and, most importantly, listen to uncover connections between the donor and your agency's work. Ask people about their experience growing up in parks and recreation — most will say that it contributed to the adults that they are today. Cultivation is also a way of educating the prospective donor about the importance and impact of your work.

DONOR INTERESTS

Donor interests that commonly intersect with the work of parks and recreation include:

- Community engagement
- Afterschool and summer learning
- Sports-based youth development
- Youth violence reduction/conflict resolution; caring adults/mentoring
- Jobs for teens
- Anti-obesity and healthy lifestyles
- Water safety
- Safe places to play
- Afterschool and summer meals
- Career exploration
- Cultural programs/arts education
- Outdoor education/environmental education
- Active living for seniors

D. SOLICIT FUNDS

After you have identified and cultivated prospective donors, your timing for making the “ask” is key. Sometimes, this is easy to determine: foundations usually set deadlines to submit a proposal, or they may request a Letter of Intent (LOI) to apply before issuing an invitation to submit a full proposal. Corporations often create their philanthropy and/or marketing budgets a few months prior to the start of their new fiscal year, so it is best for your request to be submitted by September for programs and projects in the next calendar year.

TIP

Ways of cultivating donors could include an “insider’s” tour of your system and/or a luncheon with teens who have their first job at your agency.

Although year-end giving is still a popular concept, individuals make major gifts all year long. The best way to determine whether the time is right is to ask the donor. Here are some questions and discussion topics:

- Which of the programs we have discussed resonate the most with your giving priorities?
- Do you feel that you know enough about us and the program, or shall we provide more information?
- The amount that we are seeking to be able to implement/expand this program is **[provide dollar amount]**. What is the range of gift that would be appropriate for us to request from you?

Follow up speedily with a request if the donor has given you a green light. If that light is yellow, wait, but keep in touch. If it is red, try again later with a program that more closely matches the donor’s interest.

E. NURTURE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Do not make the mistake of sending off an acknowledgment for a donation or grant, and then waiting until it is time for a renewal to make your next contact. You need to thank your donors, but make sure to move beyond the transactional nature of giving and receiving and honor the relationship that has developed between you. You and the donor now share a commitment to advance your agency’s work. This relationship deserves special attention, which fundraisers call “stewardship.”

TIP

Challenge grants, which require some ratio of matching funds, are a great way to inspire donors. For example, a donor offers \$5,000 if you can raise an equal amount by a specific deadline. Then, everyone’s gift counts twice as much!

Donors want to feel appreciated for their contribution and reassured that their money matters. You can send a quick note and/or photo of people participating in a program they have supported, or bring your contributors together for a return on investment report. When donors feel that their contribution has made a real difference, they will want to support you again.

If you run into obstacles with a funded program, it helps to have had regular communications with the donor. Challenges like staff changes and unavoidable delays do happen; you can continue to be a trusted partner if you provide candid, immediate updates.

If you have received a “no” in response to a request for support, you should keep that source in your communications loop. When they have a clearer sense of the impact that you are making, your next request may be better received.

IV. PURSUE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Resource development means gathering additional funds and/or services to extend your park and recreation agency's capabilities to serve your public. In this section, we will explore various strategies for acquiring resources, in order from "low-hanging fruit" — partnerships and funding available to public agencies — to a formal fundraising program run by your own park and recreation foundation.

A. SECURE PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROGRAMS, PROJECTS AND GRANT REQUESTS

Partnerships work when two entities have complementary assets. Parks have enormous value for residential neighborhoods, schools and businesses as a quality-of-life factor. Neighborhood organizations, schools and business have potential volunteers and, in some cases, funds to invest in park and recreation needs.

A partnership between a park and recreation agency and a local nonprofit for the purpose of soliciting funding for a mutually beneficial program or project is a very workable strategy. It requires trust and close coordination. It is also imperative to have a formally approved, written agreement — a Memorandum of Understanding or Cooperative Endeavor Agreement — that articulates the roles and responsibilities of each party. The nonprofit may reserve a small percentage of a grant for fiscal and administrative oversight, which is normal practice and should be incorporated in the program budget.

Local service clubs like Elks, Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis and others sometimes adopt programs, not only soliciting funds but also raising awareness for your programs and services. Public health entities can help support or market free and low-cost park and recreation programs.

TIP

Outside funding can never replace public support. It can, however, provide significant leverage to enhance services by way of purchases of equipment, supplies, marketing and professional development to increase organizational capacity. Requests most likely to be funded include program development or expansion and special, time-limited projects. Philanthropic support can help you test more innovative programs that may be a gamble for your agency to fund from the start.

CASE STUDY: CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY

Sarah Bryant, AICP, director of Community Initiatives for the Cooper's Ferry Partnership in Camden, New Jersey, says, "We are a municipality of 77,000 people, and we do not have a stand-alone park and recreation department. Public Works runs park operations, and Human Services runs programs. Our city budget is so limited, we have no funds for maintenance. If parks aren't maintained, they are not used. It is our biggest challenge."

Partnerships are the answer. The city was able to create and maintain a new park as part of a waterfront development: a local developer contributed \$2 million toward construction of the park, and the condo association funds its maintenance on an annual basis. Schools adopt parks, and community organizations perform daily maintenance at others.

CASE STUDY: HOUSTON, TEXAS

Rose Esteves, CPRP, senior community liaison for Grants, Management and Finance Division, Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD), has developed a multiyear partnership with its local Student Conservation Association (SCA) chapter, focused on the agency's Natural Resource Management Program. Together, HPARD and SCA identify projects that can engage SCA interns and crews, and then, they research grant funding opportunities. SCA, a 501(c)(3) organization, applies for the grants and, once grants are secured, manages and reports on the funding. HPARD provides an in-kind match of staff hours and other services, such as mowing and watering. SCA and HPARD also solicit other in-kind contributions, such as trees for planting projects, training (chainsaw certification and GIS mapping), and staff expertise (plant identification and GIS mapping).

B. REQUEST FUNDS AVAILABLE TO PUBLIC ENTITIES

Sources for park and recreation fundraising that are closest at hand are grants from NRPA and others highlighted on NRPA's website at nrpa.org/Grant-Fundraising-Resources.

Other sources include:

- Grants for the improvement of outdoor recreation facilities from the Land and Water Conservation Fund; these grants must address the priorities in your state's SCORP and are highly competitive
- State funding for public health, brownfield remediation and stormwater management/green infrastructure
- Recreational Trails Program funds from the federal government and many states
- Marketing dollars from health insurance providers in your state, which are often targeted to spend in the fall when people make decisions about health plan enrollment

In addition to health insurance providers, some private vendors and organizations work with government entities. The National Fitness Campaign (nationalfitnesscampaign.com) subsidizes the creation of their Fitness Court. KaBOOM! (kaboom.org) supports the development of playgrounds. Both of these entities provide some funding; the park and recreation system or a partner must raise the balance. FitLot (fitlot.org) has been commissioned by AARP to build an outdoor fitness center in every state.

When you submit a request for funding, explicitly follow the funder's guidelines. If you do get a rejection, dedicate some time to figure out the flaws in your request. Here are some common — and avoidable — errors:

- The request is ineligible because either you are submitting as a park and recreation agency when the proposal must be submitted by a 501(c)(3) organization, or a nonprofit is submitting a request on your behalf when the eligibility is limited to public park and recreation agencies.
- The request does not align with the funder's specific priorities. For example, you are asking for a playground from a health funder committed to addressing youth hunger.
- The request is poorly written, with incomplete sentences and spelling errors; and/or it is too wordy, supplying information that is irrelevant to the request; and/or it does not provide the information requested.

TIP

Sometimes, funders will give you direct feedback about their reasons for rejecting your request. You definitely should ask for their comments, because it is an important way to cultivate that relationship and, perhaps, get to a "yes" on your next submission.

- The budgets do not make sense and/or include unsustainable budget items, such as a full-time position for a one-year grant.
- The program does not utilize partnerships, meaning that work will be done in a silo.

Keep in mind that, if you submit a sloppy proposal, the funder has to assume that your work will be sloppy, too — neatness counts!

C. COLLABORATE WITH BUSINESSES

Corporations value improvement to the communities where their employees and customers live, work and play. The kinds of support available from businesses can include:

- Matching gifts for donations made by employees
- Contributions based on employees' volunteer time
- Volunteer participation on park and recreation boards and/or committees
- Expertise in marketing, finance, information technology and human resources
- Donations of office furniture
- Supplies and services that could include a day-long employee community project, such as sprucing up a fieldhouse through painting and landscaping
- Corporate social responsibility grants, similar to public or foundation grants

TIP

In jurisdictions lacking a major corporate presence, small businesses could be solicited for acknowledgment on a “brick” in a public area for a capital project or on a nicely designed poster in your government lobby for program support. Twenty businesses giving \$500 each totals \$10,000!

Corporations often seek public recognition. Typical perks for businesses are brand visibility on program or facility signs and materials (both physical and online), opportunities to host promotions of their products and services, and public acknowledgment of their investment by elected officials.

Sponsorship is not technically fundraising. It is a marketing strategy to connect a company to its target market. A business is using your assets (such as properties, signage, programs, newsletters, media, events) to sell its goods and services to current and prospective customers. While sponsorship is not charitable giving, it does enhance a company's image as a good corporate citizen, and park and recreation agencies are well-positioned to associate a company's brand with a positive and healthy lifestyle. Usually, you can use sponsorship funds for unrestricted purposes. Remember that you must deliver on the benefits that you promise and report on them, too.

D. CONSIDER SPECIAL EVENTS

As a fundraising strategy, special events can be greatly successful — or not at all. Park and recreation agencies hold special events year-round and often are successful in securing some underwriting, in addition to admission revenue, to cover expenses and marketing. When planning an event specifically for the purposes of fundraising, be aware that gross income less all expenses — the net amount — is the most significant number. You need discipline to adhere to a detailed expense budget, and your volunteer leadership must commit to achieving the income projections for sponsorships and top-level

TIP

Social media in general can be very helpful in telling your story, which is key to successful fundraising. There are many platforms that offer fundraising help, some specific to nonprofits. Aim to recruit young people to form a committee to strategize on a social media fundraising campaign.

ticket purchases. The human factor is also important. Staging a fundraising event takes a lot of staff time and requires their attention to the details, even when you have volunteers.

On the plus side, when you have a parks and recreation-related cause to celebrate — such as recognizing an alumnus of your sports league who is a respected local leader — and you have a cadre of enthusiastic, experienced volunteers, you can use the opportunity to highlight your programs as an effective way for people to invest in your community. Special events can help you gain more friends and potential donors.



During the opening of a multi-use shelter at Hidden Pond Nature Center in Springfield, Virginia, a Fairfax County Park Authority volunteer shows local children a turtle from the center. Photo courtesy of Fairfax County Park Authority.

E. MOTIVATE COMMUNITY LEADERS TO CREATE A PARK AND RECREATION FOUNDATION TO BENEFIT YOUR AGENCY

A park and recreation friends group may focus on one specific park or neighborhood. If this group is already a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that can be energized to support your park and recreation system because of its wide community benefits, then you are well on your way to a structured fundraising program. If not, there are steps to take to set up your own park and recreation foundation.

Do you know prominent park champions, such as business leaders, judges, newscasters and professional sports figures? These could be volunteer coaches and/or parents of young people who participate in your agency's programs. Recruit three to five people to form a Parks and Recreation Champions Committee to set up a foundation for the specific purpose of supporting local parks and recreation. The script may look something like this:

"We have been studying our community needs and matching solutions to them with citizen preferences for recreation programming and park amenities. For your review, here is our assessment and an outline of the objectives that we have set."

"We know that we need more funds to realize these objectives than we currently have from our regular resources, and we seek leaders to start a fundraising foundation to benefit our community. We are speaking with people like you who have experienced for themselves the importance of parks and recreation in shaping their lives and contributing to their success."

“We ask that you join us by providing financial and other support (e.g., legal help for filing for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status), serve as one of our first Board members, be a committed spokesperson for this effort, and link us to your personal and business connections for successful fundraising.”

Before it receives its IRS nonprofit designation, this committee can contribute and solicit funds under the aegis of a fiscal agent/sponsor or local community foundation.¹

CONCLUSION

You can rally support for an improved park and recreation system that makes your community a great place to work and play, raise a family and develop talented employees. We close with advice and encouraging words regarding fundraising from your colleagues in parks and recreation:

- **Listening is very important.**
- Funders are not accustomed to bureaucracy.
- You need the buy-in of the agency director and employee engagement, or staff will not do extra work.
- Have relationships already established with community partners and citizens, so you can get a letter of support in less than a week.
- If a funder wants a lot of say in **how** a project is completed, it may not be a great fit, as you need to do what is best for the public and not what's best for the funder.
- Be a good storyteller: When you get grants, tell the story to the public, to your staff internally, to elected leaders. Being a good storyteller helps bring in more funds.
- Have funding priorities. Don't chase grants as they come in, take your ideas and seek grants that fit those.
- Community engagement is very important.
- **You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take.**

¹ Working with a fiscal agent or sponsor requires adherence to specific rules. They do not simply hold and distribute funds, as they are required to act as a 501(c)(3) in terms of stewardship of accepting and disbursing donated monies. They charge fees for their services. This strategy is good for a time-limited project or nonprofit startup.

RESOURCE GUIDE

These resources include free and low-cost information and trainings.

CORPORATIONS AND SPONSORSHIP

Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose® (CECP)

cecp.co

Provides good insight into the way that businesses think about giving

The Sponsorship Collective

sponsorshipcollective.com

Free resources and blog

FISCAL SPONSORSHIP

National Network of Fiscal Sponsors

fiscalsponsors.org

Information about fiscal sponsors who can serve as a nonprofit partner

FOUNDATION AND PUBLIC GRANTS RESEARCH

Inside Philanthropy GrantFinder

insidephilanthropy.com

GuideStar

guidestar.org

Foundation Center's Foundation Directory Online

fconline.foundationcenter.org

(Subscription required; could be available for free at your public library or community foundation)

GrantWatch

grantwatch.com

FUNDRAISING, ALL TOPICS

Charity Navigator

charitynavigator.org

Nonprofit Hub

nonprofithub.org

Nonprofit Learning Lab

nonprofitlearninglab.org

FUNDRAISING AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR PARKS AND RECREATION

Central Park Conservancy Institute for Urban Parks

centralparknyc.org/institute

City Parks Alliance

cityparksalliance.org

National Association of Park Foundations

The-NAPF.org

Project for Public Spaces

pps.org/article/get-funded-tips-for-a-new-era-of-place-making-philanthropy

List of prospective funders for public space philanthropy tied to the concept of "placemaking"

FUNDRAISING POLICIES

Fairfax County, Virginia, policies for fundraising (Policy 106) partnerships (107), naming park and facilities (304) and sponsorships (406)

fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/assets/documents/administrative/park-policy-manual.pdf

GRANT WRITING

GrantSpace

grantspace.org

The Grantsmanship Center

tgci.com

Grant Station/GrantHub

grantstation.com/plp-partners/GrantHub

NRPA. (November 2011). "Grant Writing Tips for the Non-Grant Writer." *Parks & Recreation* magazine, p. 71.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

United Way of America. (© 1996). "Excerpts from Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach."

SOCIAL MEDIA FUNDRAISING

TechSoup

blog.techsoup.org/posts/7-tips-for-fundraising-on-social-media

VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP

BoardSource

boardsource.org

CompassPoint

compasspoint.org

Back cover image: Instructors and volunteers teach gym class students at Jefferson Academy Elementary School in Broomfield, Colorado, how to skate on indoor plastic ice. Photo courtesy of Benjamin Sweet, Apex Park and Recreation District (Arvada, Colorado).



NRPA National Recreation
and Park Association

Because everyone deserves a great park

ABOUT NRPA

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing parks, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of 60,000 recreation and park professionals and advocates, NRPA supports healthy and active lifestyles, conservation initiatives and equitable access to parks and public space. NRPA brings strength to our message by partnering with like-minded organizations including those in the federal government, nonprofit organizations and commercial enterprises. Funded through dues, grants, registration fees and charitable contributions, NRPA produces research, education and policy initiatives that ultimately enrich the communities that our members serve. For more information, visit www.nrpa.org.

