

Fundraising may seem intimidating, but it can be a fun and rewarding challenge.

Fundraising

Many community tree committees are surprised to find the fundraising process much easier than anticipated. There are many individuals and organizations eager to support tree-planting and beautification efforts locally.

A key to successful fundraising is involving the right people. The fundraising subcommittee chairperson of your community forestry committee should have a positive, upbeat attitude, have some experience in fundraising if possible, and welcome the challenge. It is essential to view all businesses and organizations in your community as potential partners in a program that ultimately benefits everyone.

First Key Steps

- **Designate** a fundraising chair or co-chairs or someone to focus on fundraising.
- **Assess** community connections and resources – what existing groups or individuals can help you?
- **Develop** immediate and long-term fundraising plans.
- **Seek** community partnerships.

Raising Funds Quickly

The following are some ideas for how your group can raise funds relatively quickly:

Local Businesses and Service Clubs

Request funding support for a project.

Individuals

Request donations in person, by telephone, by mail, or through the newspaper (personal contacts are best).

Memorial and Recognition Tree Plantings

Promote individual donations by setting up special plantings in a local park or arboretum to commemorate



special events (births, anniversaries, deaths, etc.). Keep in mind these can involve additional costs (e.g., a memorial plaque).

Merchandise Sales

Sell T-shirts, mugs, calendars, buttons, cloth bags, etc.

Retailers "Percent Day"

Ask retailers to designate a percent of their sales for one day to support your tree group or project.

Special Events

Raise funds through special events, such as festivals, bike races, runs, bake sales, pancake breakfasts, food stands, sporting events, etc. Any of these could become an annual event.

Plant Sales

Annual spring or fall tree or plant sales.

United Way

Ask residents to designate their donations to the local tree program (employers should have information about "donor options.")

Local Home and Garden Shows

Ask for complimentary booth space. Consider selling merchandise, and promote projects and involvement.

Tour of Homes

Sponsor a tour that focuses on trees and landscaping.

Donation Jars

Place them in local businesses.

Fraternities and Sororities

Ask for donations if you're in a college town.

Other Local Non-profits

Ask for donations (suggest a partnership with your committee.)

Long-Term Fundraising

These fundraising methods involve more planning, such as grant writing, often have longer waiting periods before funds are received, and typically require rigorous record-keeping.

City And County Governments

Work with your city council to establish an annual line item in the city budget for tree planting and care. These dollars can match other grants and will provide a stable source of funding.

Utility Company Grants

Iowa's investor-owned utilities sponsor community grants and some communities may qualify to apply for grants annually from both gas and electric utilities. In Illinois, check with your utility provider to determine if it has a general community grant. For example, Ameren, ComEd, and Illinois American Water have grants available in communities where they operate.

Corporate or Private Foundations

Pursue grants from charitable corporate or private foundations to fund local projects. Determine if your community is served by a community foundation; these are sources of financial and fundraising support.

Annual Fundraising Events

Develop an annual fundraiser that works for your group in your community.

Should Your Committee Become a 501(c)3 Tax-Exempt Organization?

Tax-exempt status and exemption from paying sales tax are two entirely different issues. If your organization has tax-exempt status with the IRS, it does NOT exempt you from paying state sales taxes on plant materials, supplies, or services that you purchase for your various projects. Tax-exempt status means that donations made to your organization may qualify donors to reduce their tax obligation if they itemize their annual income taxes.

Your group must also be incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation at the state level. There are usually reporting requirements for nonprofit organizations and applicable fees. Contact your Secretary of State's office for more information.

The Trees Forever resource guide *Understanding Tax-Exempt Status* provides additional information on becoming a 501(c)3 organization and alternatives to applying for tax-exempt status.

General Grant Writing Tips

Grant writing may seem daunting, but with a little preparation and careful planning, it can be done. The following are some tips for grant writing:

- Make sure your project meets the goals of the granting organization.
- Talk with the contact person from the granting organization.
- Don't be afraid to ask people in the community for help writing a section of the grant or reviewing what you have prepared.
- Give yourself plenty of time to prepare and **be sure to read the instructions.**
- Start with an outline or timeline to help get words on paper.
- Assume reviewers are not familiar with your project or town, the location of the project, and the need for the project.
- Choose language wisely – avoid acronyms, local lingo, or words that someone outside the community would not understand.

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- Use the grant-maker's language, be clear and to the point (no need for fancy language).
- Check spelling and grammar. Poorly written grants will leave a bad impression with the grantors.
- Be sure your grant shows community support. If you can include attachments, submit support letters from business owners, other community groups, or the mayor.
- Include in your proposal any groundwork that has been completed on the project, money already raised, and any in-kind contributions received.
- Document the work you have put into the process, including any media coverage.
- Always send in a **complete application**. Answer all questions completely, address all issues, and include all attachments requested.
- After you receive funding, do everything you said you would (or call the funder if you run into issues).
- If you don't receive funding, find out why, and what you can do next time to make the grant proposal better. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again!

Join Trees Forever on its mission to plant and care for trees and the environment by empowering people, building community and promoting stewardship.

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