Chapter 5

Funding Your Network

Many groups’ goals are to do education and outreach that don’t require extensive funding. But, should your group wish to pursue activities that involve measurable impact or concrete action, you may want to find funding. This chapter presents some possible ways to help your group achieve its funding goals.

Funding models

There are some basic funding models for community groups.

- **Fee-based** funding models include membership and event fees. Membership-based organizations assess people a fee to be members of the group. This model gives the group a lot of latitude to determine their goals and how they’d like to accomplish them. Some groups assess a fee (such as admission) to cover the costs of holding an event. Essentially, this is a cost-recovery strategy.

- **Grant-funding** agencies will support community groups for specific projects and desired outcomes, but few will provide funding for general support without a connection to a project. So, a grant is a possibility if a group has projects it would like to accomplish, but it probably is not a funding option for general events.

- **Sponsorships** engage organizations and agencies to contribute to the community group, usually in exchange for some kind of recognition, such as the opportunity to present their own programs or resources to the audience.

**Fee-based**

Whether to be a membership-based group or to hold fee-based events should be a group decision, but it warrants conversation early in each group’s formation. There are always costs associated with meetings, from honorariums for speakers to covering the main dish and drinks at a potluck. Having monetary resources for group maintenance will alleviate some stress and burden placed on individuals.

Sometimes paying to attend an event encourages people to attend; they’ve made a monetary commitment, now they want to come and see what they’ve paid for. The counter argument to this is that if you’re able to offer programming for little or no cost, more people can participate; and, there is the possibility that people will want
to contribute in other ways to “pay” for what they’re getting—in other words, they’re willing to volunteer to cover perceived obligation.

If charging for events becomes a standard practice, consider building a small fund so your group can offer scholarships to people who would not be able to participate otherwise. (Sponsors may also offer scholarships; see “Sponsorships,” page 51.)

The idea of an annual membership fee has merit. Though many of the services the network provides might be of minimal dollar cost (such as online newsletters, email notifications of events and opportunities), the annual membership fee could cover costs associated with regular network events. A special event, such as an overnight retreat, would require an extra fee to cover the higher cost.

**Grants**

A grant can provide your group the opportunity to achieve projects or undertake other specific activities. Many funders have specific geographic regions or specific technical or conservation issues with which they work. It usually takes some research to match your group’s desired activity to possible funders. There are many websites that aggregate grant opportunities. A simple Google search using key words tied to desired outcomes and “grant opportunities” can help you match your group’s goals to funders. Each funder has specific steps and requirements for proposals, so be sure to read the request for proposals (RFP) closely. See the Grant Proposal Template on page 52.

**General grant-writing tips**

- Find out who has funded grants similar to your proposal. Talk to people who were funded, and ask for advice or a copy of their project proposal.
- Read the potential funder’s guidelines carefully. Look for what kinds of projects they will fund and when proposals are due. Make sure the duration of the grant (1 year, 2 years) is long enough to accomplish your objectives.
- Use the same terms in your proposal that the funder uses to describe what they want to fund. Show how your project dovetails with their objectives.
- Be clear and concise. Your proposal abstract or executive summary is often the first decision-point for reviewers. Write so that your proposal is easy to read and presents your ideas well.
- Identify measurable outcomes. Once the work is finished, what will be produced? How will it be shared? How many people will benefit?
- Know your limitations. Don’t get too ambitious and promise more than you can realistically attain.
- Have someone review and help you edit your proposal. Fresh eyes are always a great addition!
- Don’t consider rejection a failure. Perhaps the idea didn’t mesh closely enough with the funder’s goals. The process of planning and writing has given you a product that you can resubmit elsewhere. Incorporate feedback, when given, to make your proposal better for the next submission.
- Make it fun! You want to enjoy what you’re doing while working toward your goals.
Purdue Cooperative Extension has created a helpful resource, “Writing a Successful Grant Proposal.” You can find it here: http://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/ec/ec-737.pdf

Perhaps your network is not formally organized enough (that is, incorporated, nonprofit status, etc.) to develop grant proposals for projects. There are many partners, such as your local university Extension Service, who are willing to work with less-formal networks and serve as the umbrella organization that makes application and handles the purse strings on your network’s behalf.

**Sponsorships**

Sometimes organizations are willing to cover meals or sponsor an event or scholarship in exchange for a few minutes to present to your group. Some of these organizations are:

- Farm Credit
- Farm Service Agency
- State forestry associations
- Forest industry

**Community organizations**

No group should go it alone. Contact the many community organizations that have similar goals and missions to yours, and foster relationships with them. How can your network add value to the community or help other organizations reach their own goals? How can you work together to meet shared goals?

Some community partners to consider are:

- County conservation districts. They often can help with mailing costs, getting mailing lists from county assessor tax records, and printing.
- Local Extension Service office. The staff there can help with finding speakers, resources, topics for presentation, and printing.
- County service foresters. They help find speakers, resources, and topics for presentation.
- Land trusts and conservancies. These help with finding speakers, resources, topics for presentation, and can serve as grant partners or applicants for funding. Some may have small funds they can distribute within the community for outreach groups such as peer networks.
- Other nonprofit conservation organizations.

All of the above can serve advisory roles to networks.
**Grant Proposal Template**

Most grant requests for proposals (RFPs) provide a detailed outline of what they want to see in the proposal. Commonly required components are listed below.

1) **Executive summary or abstract**
   1) Summary of proposed project, including total amount requested
   2) Outputs and outcomes
   3) Why your organization should receive funding (experience and capacity)

2) **Introduction**
   1) Reason proposed project is needed, supported with background data
   2) How your organization will address those needs
   3) Why your organization is uniquely poised or qualified to meet those needs
   4) Bibliography or references if needed

3) **Project approach**
   1) Goals and objectives
   2) Methods
   3) Impacts and outcomes (also called deliverables)
   4) Project timetable
   5) Project evaluation plan. (See Chapter 7 for more information on evaluations.)
   6) Plan to continue after funds are gone
   7) Key staff and outside partners involved in project

4) **Organizational information**
   1) Mission and history
   2) Summary of past and future projects
   3) Past or similar accomplishments

5) **Budget**
   1) Outline of costs and expenses: review guidelines and what they do not fund

6) **Supplemental information (varies according to proposal)**