Your Urban and Community Forestry programs deserve support.

This short tutorial and introduction to the world of fund raising is intended to help you secure part of the vast amount of grant money given away each year by private foundations, corporate grantmakers, and government sources. Charitable donations reached a record $203.5 billion in 2000, the 13th record-setting year in a row.

Although grant seeking is a competitive activity, it's helpful to know that private foundations, government agencies, and others are actually required by law to give away money. For example, federal law requires private foundations to give away a minimum of 5% of their total assets each year. You can begin to get a sense of how much money this involves by considering just one major foundation: the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—the wealthiest in the country—with assets of $17 billion at the close of 1999, had to give away $850 million that year alone! This and other funds like it are being given away all the time to responsible groups engaged in worthwhile activities. Your Urban and Community Forestry group or organization is eligible to access money from many different sources, but you have to ask in order to receive!
The information here is intended to help you begin thinking about the many fund raising possibilities available to your Urban and Community Forestry or environmental organization, as well as some important general issues to consider about your organization in terms of beginning to raise funds. The following information provides you with an overview of important aspects of fund raising and grant writing, combined with links to sites offering a wealth of online resources.

This tutorial doesn't aim to reinvent the wheel. While many of us in the Urban and Community Forestry movement may be relatively new to fund raising and grant writing, we can rely on several well-established experts in the philanthropic field in the United States. The information here on the TreeLink site gives you an overview of some general considerations when fund raising, and then provides links to the recognized leaders in the field. These leaders and sources of information can provide you with a variety of easy to use tools for identifying potential funders and writing successful grant applications.

One major purpose of this tutorial is to connect you with the Foundation Center and the Grantsmanship Center—two of the preeminent sources of fund raising information in the country. These two groups also offer the best and most widely recognized courses on grant and proposal writing available. By visiting their web sites and using the grant writing materials available there, you can begin learning or enhancing your ability to write successful proposals and win important grant money for your organization. Links to these groups, as well as suggested readings, are provided after the following overview.

Your well planned Urban and Community Forestry efforts can be funded!

On to: Overcome Anxieties >>
Many non-profit groups, community organizations, or grassroots movements have little experience in fund raising. The prospect of raising funds, asking for money, or writing a proposal can seem daunting or even overwhelming. Many people think they need experience in order to be successful. While experience certainly helps, it's not a prerequisite and lack of it won't prevent you from winning grants if you learn some of the basics of funding raising and grantwriting.

Following are some common statements people make when considering the prospect of fund raising. See if any of them sound familiar to you.

"I don't have the time."

"I know nothing about fund raising."

"I don't have any experience."

"I don't want to be turned down."

"Nobody would fund us."

"We're not set up to handle grant money or donations."

Overcoming doubt and anxiety is one of the most important things to do when first thinking about fund raising. By gaining knowledge of some of the basics, you can increase your confidence. Anxiety about seeking grants is understandable, but you shouldn't let it prevent you from trying to get funding that is being given away all the time to organizations or groups similar to yours--others involved in a range of environmental, green, and Urban and Community Forestry issues and activities.

By working through this overview and following the links to other organizations and resources, you can develop or hone your own abilities to produce successful grant applications. However, before focusing on your own personal skills, it's important to consider certain organizational issues.
One major issue is that nonprofit status is a general requirement for receiving charitable donations. To be successful in fund raising and in order to gain access to the broadest number of grant making organizations, your organization must be incorporated. You'll need to apply for classification by the IRS as a tax-exempt organization to which contributions are tax deductible under Section 501 (c) (3) of the IRS code. If your organization has not yet reached the point where it has incorporated, here are some options:

- Apply for incorporated/non-profit status:

  Knowing that your organization has the potential to expand and improve if it only had more funding can provide a rationale for incorporating. For complete information on requirements for gaining nonprofit status, visit the IRS web site at www.irs.gov, click on “Site Tree,” and look up “Tax Exempt Organizations.” You'll learn about the various types of tax exempt organizations and access publications and forms for the application procedure.

  Also, the AOL Time Warner Foundation and the Benton Foundation offer invaluable information on starting a nonprofit on their joint web site at www.helping.org. Visit the site, then click on “Nonprofit Resources” for a comprehensive menu of information and resources regarding successful nonprofit operation.

- You can partner with another group that already has nonprofit status:

  If your group or organization is not yet ready to take the step of gaining nonprofit status, one option is to form a partnership with an organization that is a nonprofit. Forming partnerships offers many potential advantages, including pooling of resources, networking, and potential funders often like to see cooperation between groups with similar missions.

On to: Fund Raising/Grant Seeking Basics >>
### Introduction

Seeking funds involves some basic steps:

1. The process should begin with a problem or need. Just as a home needs to be built on a solid foundation, successful grant seeking efforts need to be built on and around a specific problem or need. Funders want to give money that will fund solutions to problems. It won't be very effective to think in simplistic terms of what you want for your organization. It's understood that organizations require money for all sorts of expenses. You won't be much more effective and persuasive in your efforts if you begin with a specific problem or need your organization can address as the core of your grant seeking activity. You won't find a natural link to potential funders because you are both interested in solving the same problems.

2. Realize that the bulk of the work in grant seeking is in planning—not in writing a proposal. Many people make the common mistake of getting too excited when they find a funder with similar interests and immediately start the writing process. But this is like starting at the end instead of the beginning. You can't formulate a good and persuasive proposal and project without first carefully planning it. The stages of planning will become very clear once you access proposal planning and writing materials from the Foundation Center or the Grantsmanship Center. Their proposal formats take you step-by-step through the proposal planning and writing process, so that you know what problem you are trying to address, how you'll address it, and how you'll know when you've accomplished what you set out to do.

3. In Real Estate the mantra is “location, location, location.” In grant seeking, it's “guidelines, guidelines, guidelines.” One of the biggest secrets in seeking grants or donations is as simple as following the directions outlined by grant makers. This point can't be overemphasized. Surveys of grantmakers have found that the single most common reason proposals are rejected is because the funder's guidelines have not been followed. The ability to follow directions is far more important than your own ability to write well. It's sad when otherwise good proposals are rejected, after time and effort has been devoted to them, only because a minor guideline was not followed. The fact is that you'll be turned down if you don't follow the directions. Grant seeking is a competitive process. It's estimated that only 3 out of 10, or 30-40% of proposals will be funded. This statistic doesn't have to be discouraging and can be minimized simply by making sure you are not disqualified by not having followed simple directions about deadlines, requested information, etc.

4. Grant seeking is truly a numbers game. Once you've perfected
your proposal and project idea in the form of a grant application, you need to be willing to identify and send it out to as many potential funders as you can. If you really need to have two or three proposals funded, send out 10 proposals to help ensure that you'll bring in the amount of money you need.

5. Build relationships. This is another way to combat the inherent competitiveness of grant seeking. To whatever extent possible, try to build relationships with program officers at funding sources to which you send proposals. This is a process that must be done on a case-by-case basis. Some program officers are more willing to talk and answer questions than others. Trust your intuition when talking to them and judge how much is enough to tell them about you and your project. It's important to remember to avoid being a pest. Avoid inventing trivial reasons to call a program officer. They are there to help, but will probably see through frivolous attempts to get their attention.

6. Be persistent. If you aren't immediately successful in winning grant money, know that this is normal. The key to success is to create a quality proposal having followed the guidelines, identify as many funding sources as possible with similar interests, and continue sending out proposals until you are successful.

7. Be a team player and get feedback. One of the most successful approaches you can have is planning and writing as part of a team. This offers several advantages: you will know from the outset that all key players are on board and have “bought off” on the effort to seek funds; you'll have everyone in place that you need in order to answer questions like “what is the problem we’re trying to address?”, “who will be responsible for carrying out project objectives?”, “who will provide information needed in different parts or attachments of the proposal (e.g. news clips, proof of nonprofit status, financial statements)?”, “who will review draft versions of the proposal?”; and so on. You don't have to be a one-person grant seeker. Have others help through all proposal phases, right up until the proposal goes out the door.

8. Hire a consultant: there’s no rule that says you have to do all this on your own. If you have some discretionary funds, use them to hire someone to help you start the process of asking for money. A consultant can help you develop a proposal template that you can then revise on your own to suit individual funder’s guidelines. Talk to other nonprofit groups or your state or local association of nonprofits to find the kind of person you want.

9. Advanced fund raising: Despite the spirited and altruistic efforts of many in the nonprofit world, the reality is that organizational development requires money. The emphasis on grantwriting in this tutorial is based on the assumption that grant money is generally the best source of potential funding for young or small organizations that are interested in improving their ability to accomplish their missions. Generally, this means expanding or growing the organizations, at least in terms of personnel and range of services offered.
Grants are only one source of organizational funding. Grantwriting should be an ongoing component of any organizational development plan, but it just happens to be one of the most important strategies in an organization's early development. One reason for this is because grantwriting requires very little in terms of existing resources. The basic investment is time and energy; one doesn't have to pay anything to apply for grant money.

However, no discussion of fundraising would be complete without at least a brief discussion of other strategies used to secure funding for nonprofits. By mentioning other methods, the hope is that you'll understand that grantwriting can set the stage for other efforts that will build upon the success of winning grants and provide other, lasting sources of organizational funding.

Public Television offers a good example of alternative fund raising methods. Most everyone is familiar with the on-air fund drives and other forms of solicitation that are the norm for PBS stations across the country. Public Television has a long and successful tradition of support from the communities they serve.

The main point in long-term fund raising management is diversification. One wants to employ as many methods of gaining funds as possible. Other forms of fund raising include hosting special events, direct mail and telephone solicitation, developing a board active in raising funds and capable of donating funds themselves, major gift programs (asking for large sums of money from wealthy individuals), membership programs, planned giving (donations that help reduce an individual's estate/capital gains tax burdens), and endowment campaigns (fund raising for a permanent, interest bearing endowment fund).

If you're interest in learning more about comprehensive organizational development and funding raising, refer to The Complete Guide to Fund-Raising Management listed under Suggested Readings.

You're now ready to start exploring links to the grant seeking and grant making world. All of the following resources and organizations are accessible via the Internet and many of them offer other opportunities for in person communication, hard copy publication and material resource information, and proposal planning and writing training workshops or seminars. Take your time as you explore the vast wealth of information each source offers. One effective way to get acquainted with everything a site offers is by clicking on the “Site Map” to get an overview of services and resources. This is also an easy way to get back to the main menu of the “Site Map” instead of always hitting the “Back” button if you've gone through several other links.

The selection of sites and suggested readings below is simply based on the strategy of trying to provide the highest quality information and resource option available. TreeLink has no vested interest in any site or publication, other than its own. The links provided are intended only as references.
On to: **Keys to Successfully Written Grants >>**
The most successful grant writers use the following strategies to get noticed and beat the competition:

**Clarity:** Picture a foundation officer with a stack of 40 proposals on her desk. How can you help her look favorably on your proposal? The answer is to keep your message as simple as possible. Grantmakers appreciate proposals that are complete, while also being concise and to the point. Use nontechnical, straightforward language and words, and remember that readers don’t have time to waste. Don’t make them read unnecessary information.

**Say How You Fit the Funding Source’s Guidelines:** Make sure your introduction tells the funder what program or funding category you’re applying to. This is important because many sources have multiple programs and funding categories. Describe how your work, mission, and proposal are a match with the funder.

**Spellcheck, Spellcheck, Spellcheck:** You are trying to sell yourself, your cause, and your request in your proposal. Avoid creating a negative impression because of misspellings, unclear sentences, or other glaring mistakes. Show funding sources respect by proofreading and sending them a mistake-free proposal.

**Don’t Reinvent the Wheel:** It’s extremely unlikely that you’ll have to start writing your proposal from scratch. There are probably many documents, resources, and materials to which you can turn for components of your proposal: your organization’s mission statement; a strategic plan; media information on your topic (newspaper, magazine articles, Internet resources); or information directly from funders’ guidelines or web sites. For example, many funders’ web sites include examples of previously funded projects, with links to project directors. Call a grant winner and ask for a copy of their proposal or a description of their project. Many grant winners also have web sites you can visit.

**Dot Your (i)s and Cross Your (t)s:** Create a final checklist for yourself to review before sending a proposal out the door. Remember, you only get one shot from readers. Make sure you’ve included everything you’re asked to submit, and that you submit everything correctly.

**Always Address the Letter to the Appropriate Person:** Never write “To Whom It May Concern.” Always address letters to the appropriate program officer/representative. Call the funding source to ask for the name if it’s not given or you can’t find it and confirm the correct spelling.
**Overall Appearance:** Number pages, treat headings and other markings consistently (same font, spacing, etc), spell out acronyms at first mention, make pages look readable (plenty of white space, avoid paragraphs longer than seven lines).

**Say Why Your Project Is Important:** Indicate why your project is important in light of current events. Mention what’s happening in your community around the issue, media information, studies or research, and how you can improve or add to other work around the same issue.

**Make Sure Your Budget Is Easy to Understand and Flows With the Proposal:** Always ask for a specific amount and tie that amount to specific project activities or needs. Say exactly what money will be spent on. At whatever stage a full budget is presented, make sure it is cleanly presented and easy to understand. And make sure the math is correct!

**Don’t Give Up!** Statistically, odds are that you’ll receive far more rejection letters than awards. Follow up is very important; find out when you can apply again or what you need to do to improve your proposal. Many funders will offer you feedback on how to improve your proposal.

**On to:** [Internet Resources >>](http://www.treelink.org/grants/keys.phtml)
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Funding Opportunities & Proposal Writing Tutorial

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Suggested Reading

Foundation and Corporate Grantmaking Resources (domestic and international)

- The Foundation Center: [http://fdncenter.org](http://fdncenter.org)
The Foundation Center is an independent nonprofit information clearinghouse, whose mission is to provide the public with helpful ways to understand foundations and corporate giving. The Foundation Center maintains a database on over 57,000 grantmakers and 243,000 grants; publishes dozens of directories, guides, research reports and books; provides free access to all Center publications in five Center-run libraries and more than 200 Cooperating Collections across the country; and offers a variety of training and educational seminars. The Center itself does not make grants or write or review grant proposals. Please visit the Center’s web site to view A Proposal Writing Short Course, or to view schedules and locations of its Proposal Writing Seminar, as well as the other kinds of information listed above.

- The Grantsmanship Center: [www.tgci.com](http://www.tgci.com)
The Grantsmanship Center (TGCI) offers low-cost grantsmanship training and publications to nonprofit organizations and government agencies. TGCI partners with local agencies across the country to offer more than 200 workshops annually in grantsmanship and proposal writing. Its 75,000 alumni benefit from regular meetings and technical assistance and other forms of support delivered through the Internet.

- TGCI’s The Grantsmanship Center Magazine is mailed to the staff of 200,000 nonprofit and government agencies in the U.S. and 58 other countries.
The TGCI proposal writing guide, Program Planning and Proposal Writing is the most widely read publication in nonprofit history, with more than a million copies in print. Many government, foundation, and corporate grantmakers have adopted this guide as their preferred application format.

- The European Foundation Centre: [www.efc.be](http://www.efc.be)
The European Foundation Centre (EFC) promotes the work of foundations and corporate funders active in Europe. Established in 1989 by seven of Europe’s leading foundations, the EFC now has a membership of over 160 independent funders and serves 7,000 organizations in 35 European countries.
The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy: www.ccp.ca
The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy is a national organization dedicated to advancing the role and interests of the charitable sector for the benefit of Canadian communities.

Federal Government Resources

- The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance: www.cfda.gov
  The Federal government of the United States of America is the largest source of grant funds in the world. The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) is a government-wide compendium of Federal programs, projects, services, and activities which provide assistance or benefits to the American public. It contains financial and nonfinancial assistance programs administered by departments and establishments of the Federal government. CFDA provides access to a database of all Federal programs available to State and local governments, federally-recognized Indian tribal governments; Territories of the United States; domestic assistance; nonprofit organizations and institutions; specialized groups; and individuals.

  GPO Access is a service of the U.S. Government Printing Office that provides free access to a wealth of information products produced by the Federal Government, including government databases, tools to locate government information, and user support. GPO Access provides access to the Federal Register, the official daily publication for rules, proposed rules, and notices of Federal agencies, including funding programs and opportunities.

- The United States Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov/seahome/grants/src/msieopen.htm
  In partnership with Purdue University, the EPA has produced an excellent grant writing tutorial. The tutorial addresses three EPA programs (Environmental Justice, Environmental Education, and Environmental Justice Through Pollution Prevention), which have some application to Urban and Community Forestry issues, but the tutorial is also useful just in terms of providing a very effective introduction to proposal writing. Its Mock Grant Writing Activity is especially helpful by allowing you to practice writing different sections of a grant application, with important tips in each sections as well as actual examples against which to compare your own work.

Other Resources

- Charity Portals:
  Charity Portals are web sites that offer searchable directories of
nonprofits. Their goal is to make it easy for people to donate money online to their favorite charity or interest. Some portals offer this service for free, others charge a small percentage of the donation. Basically, all you have to do is register with each portal by giving information about your organization, its mission, services, etc. Following are some hotlinks to the major portals: www.helping.org, www.greatergood.com, www.charitableway.com, www.allcharities.com, www.giveforchange.com, www.4charity.com.

The Chronicle of Philanthropy is the newspaper of the nonprofit world. Published every other week, it is the best news source for charity leaders, fund raisers, grant makers, and others involved in philanthropic activities. The paper (available in hardcopy and online) contains a wealth of information regarding available grants and grant making sources. Some of this material is available for free and some only by subscription.

- Nonprofit Universe: www.grantscape.com
Nonprofit Universe is a group of services offered by Aspen Publishers, Inc. and includes quality newsletters and online databases that identify potential donors in a variety of subject areas.

- The National Council of Nonprofit Associations: www.ncna.org
NCNA is a network of 39 state and regional associations with a collective membership of more than 20,000 community nonprofits. It can help you connect with your own state association of nonprofit organizations for peer-to-peer support in the nonprofit sector. NCNA state associations represent all nonprofit organizations—large and small, well-established and starting up, in all fields of nonprofit effort.

- W. Alton Jones Foundation: www.wajones.org
The W. Alton Jones Foundation offers funding under several categories of environmental programs, as well as a wealth of information and resources on environmental issues.

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