Those planning and administering budgets are always looking for ways to cut costs and increase operating efficiency.

In some cases, pre-committing funds to specific uses can be beneficial. We pre-contract with greenhouse growers for production of the specific varieties and quantities of annuals and perennials for campus needs so we’re assured of getting what we want, when we need it, at a predetermined price.

We also make pre-season purchases of certain turf and landscape maintenance products. To keep the overall budget in perspective, we note these pre-committed line items as “encumbered” on the budget printout until the funds are actually spent.

We compare the costs and efficiencies of performing various services in-house with the costs of hiring contract labor for those services. For example, we currently use in-house crews for sidewalk snow removal, and contract for the parking lot snow removal which requires a fleet of heavy equipment.

We analyze equipment use, down-time records and maintenance and repair costs. Equipment replacement is scheduled into the appropriate budget as effective usage time drops and cost of use escalates. Despite a good preventive maintenance program, we always include a line item figure for unexpected repairs.

We keep records of all outside expenditures that were not included in the original budget to determine if they merit a line item budget allocation for the next year.

Budgeting takes commitment. It’s a matter of weighing the effect of defined needs and fund requests for their impact on the overall short-term and long term goals. It is essential; an effective program requires solid guidelines.

—Richard Moffitt is Superintendent of Grounds for Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Mo., and a board member of the national Sports Turf Managers Association.

10 top turf tips

#1 - Deep aerify greens with Floyd McKay or Verti-Drain or Hydroject machines. “This isn’t a panacea, but a good idea if done properly,” Oatis says. First, though, check for proper soil moisture so the aerification process is successful.

#2 - Using asphalt or clay tampers to make sand bunkers playable almost immediately. “But do it before you open the hole for play,” Oatis says, “because you don’t want to get a reputation for having soft sand.”

#3 - Installing supplemental irrigation systems for the banks around greens.

#4 - Using burlap bags filled with soil as edging when rebuilding sand bunkers. You can sod right over the bags, which decompose with time.

#5 - “Hire someone with a computer to accurately diagnose irrigation coverage problems. You can use it to simulate what effect changes would have in coverage without ever going out in the field and trying them,” Oatis notes.

#6 - Separating the layers of soil, for courses with non-homogenenous soil profiles, to get tested. Don’t mix the layers.

#7 - Using grooming and rolling—with “good common sense and moderation”—to produce a smoother, faster putting surface.

#8 - Using 2x4 wood to level new greens (like you would concrete), or renting high-tech laser equipment.

#9 - Using a high-tech camera to find out what’s inside drain pipes if you have a high sand green and aren’t getting good drainage.

#10 - Installing supplemental irrigation systems for the banks around greens.