



Show all the tasks you do when asking for extra funds.

# Win at the budget game

**G**rounds managers must maintain properties that measure up not only to their own standards, but also to the standards imposed by their employers. Then, of course, there are the expectations of their real customers, the people that visit or use their site, whether it's a college campus or a community soccer complex.

In many cases, however, the funds available to grounds managers have been slashed, making it imperative that managers carefully put together their budgets.

## Start at the beginning

Budgeting is never pleasant, but it's vital to survival, meaning continued gainful employment. Often, your destiny is determined by the budget you prepare. Don't deceive yourself — no matter the size of your department or the facilities you manage, you'll someday prepare a budget. It's the first step in determining what you'll be able to accomplish at your facility the coming year, the projects you can accomplish and the staff you can expect to have.

**A step-by-step financial plan that gets the funds you'll need to provide your grounds services**

BY GEORGE VAN HAASTEREN, JR. / CGM

Keep in mind that a budget is not written in stone; it's more of a well-reasoned guess of the resources you'll need. It's unreasonable to expect that you'll ever meet the demands of the budget exactly, but it will help guide your decisions. Take care when you put one together.

Described another way, a budget is a financial plan. It should predict the money that you'll need to maintain and make improvements to the grounds and other facilities under your care within a fiscal year. In a sense, it's a policy document that identifies, in dollars, what gets funded and how much you can spend. It's also a definition

of operational action, expressing where the resources are to be allocated, for example, for equipment, supplies, construction and likely more than a dozen other categories.

## Capital planning

Operating budgets reflect expenditures used to operate and maintain facilities. They reflect expenditures that adjust the assets of the school, commercial campus or recreation department. Capital money is often raised through borrowing, bond issues or gifts. Items covered by capital budgets include:

- ▶ machinery that's depreciated,
- ▶ construction that's depreciated, and
- ▶ large expenses.

Examples of routine facility renewal projects that are often considered capital budget items are restoring beds around a building, renovating an athletic field, installing irrigation or any of your other sizable, non-routine projects.

## Preparing a budget

You must be intimately familiar with your responsibilities as well as any new ones you're likely to get. Communicate regularly with your administrators, your managers and the coaches at your facility. Have them provide you with a list of daily, weekly and monthly schedules. List any ongoing maintenance or renewal programs. Projects such as five-year plans may be included. Scrutinize the following categories carefully:

**Employees** — Workers should be your greatest asset, but you must know personnel costs, including fringe costs. Look at each employee's base pay, including predicted overtime. Incorporate the costs of seasonal or part-time help, and include the costs of benefits as a percentage of labor.

Student seasonal help can reduce labor costs, providing breathing room in the "labor cost" column of your budget. It has the added benefit of introducing these students to the grounds profession.

Know your employees skills. Determine how much additional training is needed to improve the productivity of your employees. Your crew must be properly trained to carry out daily tasks safely and efficiently, especially now as departments are being downsized because of revenue shortfalls.

**Equipment** — Workloads are increasing, but the size of your staff probably isn't. Budget to acquire productive, efficient equipment. Evaluate the equipment you have and determine if you have a good match between equipment and staff. Consider the equipment's age. Is it reliable or is there a lot of downtime? Do the math. Would it be more cost effective to purchase, lease or rent?

**Facilities and responsibilities** — Look at the many different areas you maintain and manage. These may include common areas, athletic fields, annual beds and parking lots. Know the square footage or acreage. Maintain a log of the amount of resources and, in particular, labor man-hours and materials required to keep them at the level that's expected.

**Special programs** — During the course of your fiscal year, you'll have to give special attention to certain areas under your care. These could be athletic fields, or where Parents' Day or graduation ceremonies are going to be held on your campus. Special events will call for additional manpower and expense, so don't overlook them.

Keep in mind that all budgets are incremental. Usually, you will receive what you received the previous year, plus or minus adjustments for program changes (plus or minus a percentage). In other words, know your present budget inside and out.

- ▶ Are you meeting expectations on your expenditures?
- ▶ Is department overtime too high because of added events or weather?

- ▶ Are there programs or lines in your budget that need adjustment?
- Work on the areas you know need improvement. Learn as much as you can

# The Recycling Company

If you're in the business of **recycling**, you need to know about **Peterson Pacific**. We make the **machines** that make your job possible. **Wood waste, C&D, land clearing, asphalt roofing...** we build **horizontal grinders** that can take it. And our **Blower Trucks** make quick work of **delivery and application** of your end product.



▲ BT 40  
Pneumatic Delivery System



HC 1410  
Track Mounted Recycler

HC 2400-B  
Asphalt Roofing Recycler ▼



*When you want the best,  
there's really only one choice...*



800/269-6520 • Fax 541/689-0804 • [www.petersonpacific.com](http://www.petersonpacific.com)

about the type of budget your administrators expect to see. Are you in a situation where you have to explain your department operations, or are they only inter-

ested in numbers? Find out the budget guidelines.

If you know that spending cannot grow more than a certain percentage in a year,

then requesting more funds may be unwise. If you absolutely have to have the extra money, suggest to those participating in the budgeting process that they take a look at the facilities under your care. Hopefully, they'll begin to see the many tasks that your department must accomplish, and what more it could do with better funding.

Add up what you know along with your existing costs and the level of services you provide along with the level of services you offer with those funds.

Add or subtract the items you know will change (retirements, rate change, staff changes). If you expect program changes, estimate the impact, then add or subtract. Next, consider the need for changes in staff or materials, depending on program changes. Also, know the unit costs for routine tasks.

**Defend your budget**

Finally, prepare to defend your budget. You're the person responsible for the appearance, safety and functionality of the grounds under your department's umbrella. You know more about your job than anyone else, and you should be able to explain the reasons why you've included certain expenditures in the budget. They may be for aesthetic reasons, or they may be for safety or security. Provide documentation if you can; it helps.

You can also build your case by text writing, spreadsheets, keeping daily logs and incorporating either pictures or videos into your budget presentation.

The best justification for expenditures is high performance, but usually that's not enough. To be a successful grounds manager, you have to know how to put together a budget, too. **LM**

— The author is Director of Grounds Operations for Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, NJ, and a former President of the Professional Grounds Management Society ([www.pgms.org](http://www.pgms.org)).

**READING PLATFORM BODIES**

● Quality and durability  
● from  
● **START...**



**TO FINISH.**

No matter which configuration you choose, all platform bodies feature traditional Reading quality for optimum durability and protection. What makes Reading bodies so tough? It all starts with a rugged understructure. Add to that the protection of Lectro-Life® immersion priming and powder coated platform sides, and you've got a winning combination.



*Stake Body*



*Platform-Toolbox combination*



*Landscape Body*



*Contractor Body*



*Redi-Dek™*

**EXPECT MORE. CHOOSE READING.**

**Reading**

**800-458-2226**  
[www.readingbody.com](http://www.readingbody.com)

©2003 Reading Body Works, Inc. Reading and Lectro Life are registered trademarks, and Redi-Dek is a trademark of Reading Body Works in the United States and in some foreign countries.