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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

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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)).

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### TOUGH TECHNOLOGY.

Silverado technology is tough technology, designed to bring you a more dependable, longer-lasting truck. That's why Silverado was the first full-size pickup ever built with a hydroformed steel front frame\* – an innovation that makes our frame exceptionally tough, strong and durable.

And now, specific Silverado models are available with QUADRASTEER four-wheel steering,† making Silverado with QUADRASTEER the most maneuverable full-size pickup you can get.‡ At highway speeds, the front and rear wheels turn in the same direction for added stability when passing or changing lanes while trailering.

### LEGENDARY POWER.

The broad and powerful lineup of engines available in a Silverado is something CAR AND DRIVER always applauds, and who are we to argue? Silverado has six legendary Vortec™ gas engines to choose from. The Vortec 8100 Big Block V8†† cranks out a full 340 horses while the mighty Duramax™ Diesel††† generates 300 horses and 520 lb.-ft. of torque to handle the biggest jobs.

### BROAD RANGE OF MODELS.

Silverado isn't just one truck. It's a whole lineup of trucks that are precision-engineered and built to our high quality standards. Whether your Silverado is light-duty, heavy-duty, long box, short box, regular cab, extended cab, crew cab, two-wheel drive or 4x4, it can help you get the job done, and get it done right.

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## Property at a glance

**Location:** Atlanta, GA

**Staff:** Post Landscape

**Category:** Condominium, Apartment Complex or Planned Community

**Total budget:** \$80,500

**Year site built:** 1998

**Acres of turf:** 1

**Acres of woody ornamentals:** 3

**Acres of display beds:** 1

**Total paved area:** 4 acres

**Total man-hours/week:** 48

## Maintenance challenges

- ▶ Parking decks
- ▶ 100% organics (trees, shrubs, beds)
- ▶ Eight theme gardens

## Project checklist

Completed in last two years:

- ▶ Dry stream beds
- ▶ Turf converted to ground covers
- ▶ Low volume irrigation

## On the job

- ▶ 3 full-time staff, 1 seasonal employee, 3 licensed pesticide applicators

# Post Gardens

## 2002 PGMS Grand Award Winner for Condominium, Apartment Complex or Planned Community

Organic is the word at Post Gardens, a nine-acre apartment community set in the upscale neighborhood of Lenox Park in the the community of Buckhead. Post Landscape uses a 100% organic fertility program for trees, shrubs, annuals and perennials due to the high use environment and to be environmentally sensitive.

"Another reason we do this is for the residents who have pets," says Property Horticulture Supervisor Kevin Hostetler, a 15-year grounds veteran.

Hostetler graduated from the University of Georgia with a horticulture degree and has worked for Post Properties ever since. He's a Certified Nursery Technician and is working on becoming a certified landscape professional. And he finds nothing wrong with taking his job home with him — he loves to work in his own yard, provided he finds the time to do it.

He and his crew have their hands full at Post Gardens, which features



University of Georgia grad Kevin Hostetler and crew maintain eight gardens.

eight theme gardens that are each their own "micro" environment

with unique needs for sun, shade, soil structures, water management, proper pruning, IPM, fertility and horticulture. The irrigation system was recently upgraded in the theme gardens, allowing the crew to become even more "water savvy" and better meet each garden's individual requirements.

**PGMS**  
**Landscape**  
MANAGEMENT

Editors' note: *Landscape Management* is the exclusive sponsor of the Green Star Professional Grounds Management Awards for outstanding management of residential, commercial and institutional landscapes. The 2003 winners will be named at the annual meeting of the Professional Grounds Management Society in November. For more information on the 2002 Awards, contact PGMS at:

720 Light St. • Baltimore, MD 21230 • Phone: 410/223-2861. Web site: [www.pgms.org](http://www.pgms.org)





An organic program keeps Post Gardens' property bright and blooming.



The one acre of turf, one acre of display beds and three acres of woody ornamentals require a total of 48 man-hours per week.





# Contractor favorites

**C**ontractors expect a lot from their trucks. They want accessibility, good gas mileage and proven brands they can rely on — all for a fair price.

However, there's always a new model that comes along that makes their "far-out" trucks seem "far gone." We wanted to know what features matter most when it comes to buying a truck, so we grilled three landscape contractors mercilessly on the topic. Here's what they had to say:

## HighGrove Partners



Greg Nelson

**Name:** Greg Nelson  
**Title:** Fleet Manager  
**Location:** Smyrna, GA  
**2002 gross revenue:** \$15.3 million  
**Business mix:** 80% commercial, 20% residential

**Employees:** 200 year-round/full-time and 30 seasonal/part-time. There are 19 three-person crews (strictly maintenance) and two floriculture crews in Atlanta.

**Company profile:** In business since 1991, the company's services are divided as follows — 55% landscape maintenance; 35% landscape design/build; 7% irrigation installation/maintenance; 2% chemical lawn care/fertilization; and 1% snow removal.

**Trucks:** "We have a total of 107 vehicles, in-

cluding three utility work vehicles, eight dump trucks of various sizes, 42 pickup trucks, 10 SUVs, four irrigation install and repair trucks, 23 open ramp trucks, eight van body ramp trucks, three Turf Care spray trucks, and one mechanic service truck."

**Features:** "All of our vehicles are built to do the intended job. Having lockable storage for the small equipment is our 'must-have' feature. For management vehicles, such as 1/2-ton and 3/4-ton trucks, driver comfort features is the must-have. Most of these are now ordered as base-extended cab units with seating and stereo upgrades. For upper management and sales vehicles, four-door seating is a must-have."

**Finance methods:** "We have bought and leased, but we're currently acquiring all new vehicles with open-end leases. About half are owned and half are leased. Cost considerations would be truck specific. The sky

isn't the limit when building a truck, and we won't go bare bones either. Our trucks are more middle-of-the-road priced. The truck has got to fit the job requirements, it must be efficient to work out of and it must present a good image."

**Dream truck:** "A Kenworth SUV or a truck that will never require a brake job. But realistically, I build my dream truck every time we spec out a new ramp truck, SUV or pickup."

## R.A.R. Landscaping Co.



Allan Davis

**Name:** Allan Davis  
**CLP, CSP**  
**Title:** Executive Vice President  
**Location:** Baltimore, MD  
**2002 gross revenue:** \$5.4 million



**Business mix:** 100% commercial

**Employees:** "R.A.R. Landscaping has 120 employees. We have a full-time Director of Human Resources, a full-time sales staff managed by a Director of Sales, Fleet Manager, and various support administrative staff. We have an executive management team of four people — President, Executive Vice President, Controller, and Vice President. Crew sizes range from two to five people. We believe that small crews are the most efficient. We handle all size properties."

**Company profile:** "R.A.R. Landscaping Co. has been in business for over 25 years, servicing the Baltimore metropolitan area. We have five service lines: grounds management, landscape design and installation, snow and ice management, tree care, and holiday decorating. We see grounds management as our core service and add services around it that offer value to our core client base. We have a commercial client base and believe in building lasting relationships."

**Trucks:** "Sales and field managers use small pickups, either Ford Rangers or Toyota Tacomas. We're looking for accessibility, good gas mileage and the ability to occasionally transport something small. Our tree care division uses various specialty vehicles, such as bucket/chipper trucks, spray rigs and regular chipper trucks. Any landscaping or landscape maintenance is handled with Ford F700 and F800 trucks with 14-foot dump bodies on them. We have several that have crew cabs to accommodate larger crews. These trucks have cab protectors and side boxes for storage. They have racks on the sides for handled tools. They also have rear swing doors, and we have custom-installed ramps on the rear. Many of our crews have Ford F350 trucks with either pickup beds or eight-foot dump beds on them. These are versatile and can be used by mowing crews, cleanup crews and install crews."

**Favorites:** "The vehicles I'm most proud of are in our van fleet. Several years ago, we began purchasing off-rental vans from Ryder. These vans are three to four years old and have anywhere from 90,000 to 130,000 miles each. We pay between \$9,000 and \$12,000 for them. We spend an additional few thousand dollars to have them painted red and have our logos emblazoned across them. They're workhorses that we use for everything, including mowing, installation, flower plantings, snow removal and even for repairs in the field. We have racking inside for equipment, and ramps that we built to load them with equipment."

**Finance method:** "We always purchase, not lease, vehicles, and most of the time take the lump sum discounts the manufacturer is offering and arrange for financing through our banks. We try to use the same dealerships and negotiate the best prices we can. We also are on a fleet discount program through Ford. We also occasionally purchase used vehicles, as in the vans, but also for our other operations."

**Dream truck:** "My dream truck would be one that never needs to sit in my lot. The vans come close, because they can be used for so many different jobs. Any vehicle that can be used for multiple functions and put in the field no matter what season is the best."

### Dickerson Landscaping



William Dickerson

**Name:** William Dickerson

**Title:** President

**Location:** Tallahassee, FL

**2002 gross revenue:** \$700,000

**Business mix:** 60% residential, 40% commercial

**Employees:** The number averages around 13 in winter and 17 in summer. Although the company prefers teams of two employees, crew sizes can range between two and five employees depending on the size of the project.

**Company profile:** "Dickerson Landscaping has been serving Tallahassee's landscaping and outdoor maintenance needs for years. We started in 1987 as Dickerson Enterprises, a lawn maintenance company. In 1993, we changed our name to Dickerson Landscaping to encompass the real focus of our company. We now offer an extensive venue of products and services including landscape design and installation, landscape maintenance, and irrigation repair and installation."

**Trucks:** "We've made a few changes with our truck fleet. We had Chevy trucks, but we dropped them and went with Fords and Toyotas. I like Toyotas for their longevity, but they aren't the most suited for this industry, so Fords have been winning out. Our fleet breakdown is as follows — three Ford 150s (2001, 2002), two 1999 Ford 350s, one 1997 Ford 477 Super Duty, two 1998 Toyota T-100s and two 2002 Toyota Tundras."

**Favorite features:** "I would have to say with Ford is the diversity. You can get so many bed designs. The Toyotas you can put through anything and they still go."

**Financing methods:** "We buy new. The reason for that is that we get better prices and warranties. When we're looking for a new truck, we write down what it is we want, then fax it out to all the dealers in the state of Florida and south Georgia. We then sit back and wait for the bids to come in."

**Dream truck:** "Toyota is my favorite, but we're going to be looking at some of the new hybrids coming out just for lawn maintenance like the Super Lawn Trucks."



# Power, versatility, comfort

**Yesterday's options  
are today's standard  
features on many  
model year 2003  
and 2004 trucks**

BY VICKY POULSEN

**W**hether it's a Ford F-150 or a heavy-duty Dodge Ram, we've found that many truck manufacturers have

packed their 2003 and 2004 lines with Herculean engine and hauling power, comfortable, spacious seating, greater handling capabilities and more standard features that were once optional. We've picked the hottest trucks — the best of the best — to make this year's list. Which one do you like?

## Chevrolet-GMC

### 2004 Canyon

#### Best features:

► Two in-line engines based on the Vortec 4.2-liter in-line six-cylinder engine. The standard engine, the 2.8-liter Vortec in-line four-cylinder, delivers 175 hp and 185 lbs.-ft. of torque. The optional 3.5-liter Vortec in-line five-cylinder delivers 220 hp and 225 lbs.-ft. of torque

► Five-speed manual transmission, a transfer case for four-wheel-drive models, and the four-speed Hydra-Matic 4L60-E automatic transmission

**2003 Silverado** (available in 3/4- and one-ton pickups, including 3/4-ton 2500HD and one-ton 3500 Series regular cabs, four-door extended cabs, crew cabs and chassis cabs)



GMC's 2003 Silverado with four-door extended cab.

#### Best features:

► Equipped with a Vortec 6000 6.0L V8 with hardened, upgraded valves and seats

► Special versions with reduced Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) (8,500 lbs.) and 9,200-lb. GVWR models are available

► Available with gas or diesel engines — Duramax 6600 6.6L diesel V8 delivers 300 hp at 3,100 rpm and 520 lbs.-ft. (705

Nm) of torque at 1,800 rpm; an optional Vortec 8100 8.1L V8 gas engine has 340 hp at 4,200 rpm and 455 lbs.-ft. (617 Nm) of torque at 3,200 rpm

► Available with the Allison 1000: full electronic control of shift-timing points, five forward speeds and helical-type planetary gear sets for quiet operation

*continued on page 62*