Sustainable Funding Models for Park Nonprofits
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Sustainable Funding Models for Park Nonprofits
SPEAKERS

John O’Gorman, Senior VP for Development, Forest Park Forever
James Snow, Director of Development, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy
Moderator: Yvette Bowden, Director, Community Vitality, Parks & Recreation, City of Boulder
Building an Endowment for a Public Park: A Nine-Figure Success Story

John O’Gorman
Senior Vice President, Development & Community Initiatives
Forest Park Snapshot
• 1,300 total acres
  • 500 acres larger than Central Park
• 13 million+ visitors
  • All 50 states, 170+ countries
• 5 major cultural inst.
• 19 miles of trails
• 36 holes of golf
• 35 tennis courts
• 40,000 trees
• 1.8 million SQF of ornamental flower beds
• 75 acres of athletic fields
• 3 playgrounds
• 1 (free) urban oasis
1876 Founding

1904 World’s Fair

Community Gathering Place
Decades of Deferred Maintenance Take Their Toll
$100 Million Restoration: 1996 – 2004
Our Task At Hand Around 2010

1. Ensure Forest Park did not fall back into decline.
2. Fund the next phase of Forest Park restoration projects.
Gap in Required Annual Maintenance Funding

- City of STL: $5M
- Forest Park Forever: $3M
- Lease Payment: $2M
- GAP: $5M

Total GAP: $15 Million
Options We Considered

1. Increase public funding (new taxes)
2. Increase annual fundraising
3. Secure new earned revenue options
4. Build our endowment to a size to cover the gap
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1. Increase public funding (new taxes)
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Secured a New Agreement Between Forest Park Forever & City of STL in 2011

1. FPF would raise $100 million to build endowment
2. City would commit to maintaining current funding for the Park
3. City, FPF would share in Park maintenance and operations
4. FPF would raise $30 million for Park restoration projects
Campaign at a Glance

$130 million goal
  • $100 million for endowment
  • $30 million for capital restoration projects
Challenges of Endowment Funding

- Explaining endowment to park donors
- Used for annual maintenance, not shiny new projects
- Planned giving was not a major feature of campaign
An Additional Challenge

Gateway Arch campaign
What We Wanted to Get Across

• Effort is BIG — ambitious, inspiring, remarkable

• Forest Park is the center of the community

• Evoke memories without centering only on nostalgia
  • Challenge: Name was “Sustaining the Glory”

Recognition: We need to invest much more
  in creative work and messaging
Changed How We Talked About the Campaign

• Forest Park suffered years of neglect and deferred maintenance. It was restored through a heroic, community-wide effort. We can never let it slip back.

• With great size, historic structures and heavy annual usage, Forest Park is very expensive to maintain.

• The Park has created great memories for so many in the community. Campaign supporters can ensure that the Park is a treasured place for future generations, forever.
Marketing the Campaign
Developed new name and brand
How We Structured the *Forever* Campaign

- 5-year effort
- Highly focused on major gifts
  - Individual/families
  - Corporate
  - Leading Foundations
- Community-wide emphasis at the campaign’s conclusion
Lean Campaign Structure

• 7-person Board-led Campaign Committee

• Executive Director devoted majority of her time to the campaign

• Modest-sized Development office

• All FPF staff had a role, every department understood its importance
Marketing the Campaign

Introduced new tag line
Marketing the Campaign
Focused on all aspects of how we presented the campaign

‘Hero Rendering’ — Key Campaign Image
Marketing the Campaign
Focused on all aspects of how we presented the campaign

Oversize format for Campaign Newsletter to reinforce scale of the effort
Marketing the Campaign

Strategic in image selection: Generational Space
Marketing the Campaign

Strategic image selection: Crowds at Iconic Park Spaces
Marketing the Campaign

Strategic image selection: Gritty daily maintenance work
Presenting FPF as a Trusted Partner

• Demonstrated track record of work in the Park

• Showed sound research on how to address funding challenges

• Highlighted our Board — community leaders

• Emphasized our trusted staff
4 Key Ways We Secured Endowment Gifts

1. Introduce donors to FPF leadership to build trust and share our vision for the future of Forest Park

2. Individualized tours of the Park providing a behind-the-scenes look at what is required to sustain the Park

3. Personalized proposals emphasizing our ongoing Park work

4. A hyper focus on major gifts from individuals, families and corporations
Forest Park Forever raises $139 million to care for the park

Forest Park Forever raised $139M for park upgrades and maintenance

Forest Park Forever exceeds $130 million goal to make park improvements

Forest Park Forever tops $130 million capital campaign goal

Crossing the Finish Line
Campaign Results

• Total raised: More than $139 million
  • 4 gifts of $10 million or greater
  • 27 gifts of $1 million or greater

• $75 million restricted to the endowment
• $33 million unrestricted campaign gifts
Building an Endowment for a Public Park: A Nine-Figure Success Story

John O’Gorman
Senior Vice President, Development & Community Initiatives
CREATING A “YOU-CENTRIC” PHILANTHROPIC MODEL
ELIMINATING MEMBERSHIP

• In 2015 the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy underwent a major shift in how we speak to our donors.

• Previously, we treated our donors as members. But what did their “membership” get them? Parks are already free and accessible for all.

• By eliminating our membership program and shifting to “you-centric” language, donors could see the direct impact of their support.
WHAT DOES “YOU -CENTRIC” LOOK LIKE?

BEFORE

AFTER
Prior to 2015 the newsletter was a major expense.

Mailed bi-annually, it was 8 pages and distributed to more than 10,000 constituents.

The staff time, material cost, and lack of actionable items for recipients made the newsletter difficult and costly to produce with little return.

TRANSFORMING THE DONOR NEWSLETTER
A NEW FORMAT

“YOU-CENTRIC” LAYOUT

• The previous 8 pages were cut down to 4 with a template that remained the same from issue to issue.

• We created sections with a common theme that made planning and content development easier. Each issue has the following parts: Front Page, Park Champions Like You, Programs You Make Possible, You Transform Our Cherished Spaces, Flex Space, Your Parks Your Stories, Coupon

A DONOR BENEFIT

• The mailing list was cut from all 10,000 constituents to current donors only, approximately 3,500.

• The newsletter name was changed. Previous called “The Voice,” it is now entitled “Donor Newsletter”

• Instead of mailing 2 issues a year, we changed to a bi-monthly model. This allowed us to get in front of our donors 6 times a year to show what their support is currently doing in their parks.
 EXPENSE TO PROFIT
• By including a remittance envelope in each issue with no hard ask, the newsletter went from a major expense to raising approximately $7,000 per issue.
• Since the transformation in 2015, there have been 25 issues raising $293,000 and climbing.

 CULTIVATION TOOL
• The new newsletter is leveraged as donor cultivation for both individuals and corporate donors.
• It gives us a reason to get in front of our donors that we may not otherwise meet.
THE RESULTS

• Placing the focus on our donors has resulted in some drastic, positive figures.

• In 2017 our donor retention rate climbed to 64.7% and currently sits above 60%.

• Individual giving has experienced exponential growth, from $179,219 in 2014 for membership to $288,740 in 2018 for general operating support.
S P E A K E R  C O N T A C T

John O’Gorman, jogorman@forestparkforever.org
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MEMBERSHIP

Your connection to information and expertise on new urban park models, practices, and innovative partnerships.

Members have access to a suite of highly-curated resources specifically designed for the parks community including:

- Webinars
- Online resource library
- Urban park study tours
- Advocacy tools
- Discounted registration to Greater & Greener

Join City Parks Alliance today! To learn more, visit our membership table in the exhibition hall or go to cityparksalliance.org/membership.

#greatergreener