



How to get the equipment you need

THE BUDGET CHALLENGES facing grounds and turf managers today require skills and knowledge beyond those found in most of our job descriptions. In order to meet fiscal challenges and justify funding needed for new equipment and resources, we must use personal attributes, professional knowledge and business relationships.

For many of us, gone are the days when a manager could simply go to his or her boss, banker, or CFO and state the need for equipment and expect the request to be fully funded. Today we are

It's important to remember that you are competing for a slice of your organization's budget pie and the others are hungry for it, too.

held accountable for every dollar and even the most necessary or justifiable expenditures are often denied. We are presented with a professional and personal challenge: How do we continue to meet our customer expectations and our own desire to succeed and perform at a high level when faced with likely rejection of capital purchase requests?

Purchasing equipment requires a well-thought-out plan and process. It's important to remember that you are competing for a slice of your organization's budget pie and the others are hungry for it, too. Developing a plan, solid talking points based on demonstrable needs, and an effective sales pitch are critical to success. Here are the steps to help achieve your goals.

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Make a list of your equipment needs and what these tools are needed for. For example, if you have sand-based fields and no topdresser, a host of problems will result that can affect turf health, quality, playability and player safety. If you have old equipment, or difficult-to-

10 TIPS ON HOW TO JUSTIFY NEW EQUIPMENT

- 1. DEMONSTRATE A RETURN ON INVESTMENT.** Show that the new equipment will somehow pay for the investment within 1 year. This is a key item.
- 2. LOBBY FOR NEW EQUIPMENT** on the basis that it will eliminate the need to hire additional help. Be careful though, a shrewd boss may use this against you later when you are trying to fill a vacancy.
- 3. USE CONCRETE FACTS AS EVIDENCE** in support of any expensive expenditure request. Show how the equipment will (1) cut costs, (2) raise revenues, (3) increase efficiency, (4) improve customer service, or (5) meet some other basic goal.
- 4. MAKE YOUR APPEAL** on the basis that the purchase will help employees to do their jobs better by eliminating errors, thus creating a savings.
- 5. SHOW HOW THE PURCHASE WILL IMPROVE PRODUCT QUALITY.** In this instance, as well as others, it will help if you get other department heads to support your request. In this case, the head of quality would be a key figure.
- 6. PROVE THAT THE NEW EQUIPMENT WILL REDUCE REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE COSTS.** Include all costs associated with down time.
- 7. SHOW THAT THE NEW EQUIPMENT WILL BE EASIER TO OPERATE,** can be used by less skilled workers and/or will result in fewer mistakes.
- 8. SHOW HOW THE NEW EQUIPMENT WILL MAKE THE COMPANY MORE COMPETITIVE IN THE MARKET PLACE—**price, cycle time, quality, etc. Identify a competitor who is using new equipment to be more competitive.
- 9. DEMONSTRATE HOW THE EQUIPMENT WILL OVERCOME A PERSISTENT PROBLEM.**
- 10. NO MATTER HOW THE JUSTIFICATION IS MADE,** the merits of your request will be greatly enhanced when your boss supports the request. Get your boss to adopt the idea as his/her own idea and request.

maintain equipment, and no regularly scheduled maintenance, your costs, downtime, crew moral and ability to meet customer expectations will be greatly diminished. Be as specific as possible as to condition, cost, and long-term consequences for continuing to use these items. Remember that you are building a case to ask for funding from stakeholders who must make difficult but sound decisions.

EVALUATE

The next important step is to gather information from the people who know your equipment needs best, your crew. Ask them for feedback. Observe their work habits and assess their knowledge, skills and use of equipment. This is particularly important if you are new to the organization. Observe current cultural and maintenance practices as well. Establish rapport with the people you work with and supervise. This demonstrates that you value their opinions and experience, and that you respect their input in making important decisions about equipment purchases. Whenever possible, operate the equipment yourself for an accurate assessment of how things work. At times there is no substitute for a hands-on assessment.

KEY QUESTIONS

Ask yourself and your crew the following questions. You will be asked these same questions when you make your sales pitch for new equipment: Will repairs solve the problem? Are maintenance, personnel, tools and shop facilities adequate? Will used equipment do the job? Is service and parts available? Would leasing be more cost-effective? If purchased, can the equipment be used to benefit other areas or groups in your organization? Those who will be asking you these questions need to justify approval of capital expenditures and need to have clear answers before making financial decisions.

Another important point to consider is one that many groundskeepers and turf professionals are truly gifted at: Can you innovate and create in a way that will reduce cost and still achieve your goals? For example, at Marietta College we were fortunate to be able to purchase much needed equipment using these steps, but we still wanted to stripe our baseball field and did not have a reel mower we could dedicate to the job. However, by purchasing simple stripping kit attachments at little cost, which we attached to our rotary mowers, we were able to creatively pattern our field.

BUDGET AND COST

Grounds and turf managers are also budget managers. Although you may not make the final decision on purchasing equipment, it's vital to have an understanding of your role in the budget process. This begins with tracking and recording maintenance costs, especially deferred maintenance. Good records can show that pouring money into old equipment is less cost-effective than purchasing new or good-quality used equipment. This is one of the most effective tools you have. Be sure you under-

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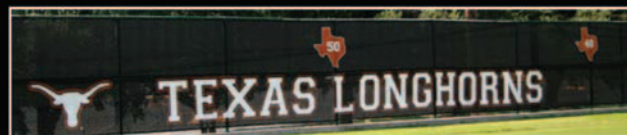
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stand your budget and its place in the organization's overall budget picture. Demonstrating a good working knowledge of the budget is important.

The path to purchasing can be smoothed if you partner with another division within your organization. For example, if equipment can be used by the athletics department and general grounds, two budget sources can partner to make the purchase. If the purchase

must be delayed, another strategy is to work to have the funding built into the next fiscal year budget. It may be worth the wait. Remember, too, you will likely be required to seek competitive pricing. Make sure your vendors have accurate information for proper costing and fairness. You don't want to lose a good business relationship by appearing to shop prices while favoring one vendor over another.

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DEMONSTRATE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The final step before making your sales pitch is to list the specific ways your organization will directly benefit from the equipment. Key talking points are: (1) increased productivity, (2) reduced maintenance costs, (3) improved user safety and playability, (4) increased profits, (5) reduced subcontractor costs, (6) more customer referrals, and (7) enhancement of turf grounds to aid in student, staff and faculty retention. It's important to remember we are in the business of creating attractive environments that lead to positive experiences for all our customers.

THE SALES PITCH

After gathering information and taking the above steps, a meeting should be scheduled with stakeholders. Understanding and using chain of command is important when engaging decision makers. If you have one or more direct reports, be sure to have them on board before a group meeting. They can be your best advocates. Other key players who should be at the table are the CFO or VP for finance, the athletic director, the facilities director, coaches, board members and field managers.

One of the critical components in our success at Marietta College was to engage a sports turf specialist from The Ohio State University Sports Turf Extension program, Pamela Sherratt. With an analysis of our sports fields in hand and an expert at the table, we were able to explain why the proper equipment was needed to maintain our athletic fields. Stakeholders understood that if equipment needs were not addressed, the investment made in our athletic fields, player safety and player performance could be adversely affected. Being well prepared, demonstrating return on investment, and having an advocate were keys to success. Be sure to thank all those involved for their support, too. Expressing gratitude will pave the way for future success.

EDUCATION

Finally, it is important to demonstrate professionalism by continuing to educate yourself, your staff and those who use your fields and grounds. Ours is an ever-

changing business. New technologies, science, techniques and information are constantly coming into play. As an old hand at grounds management, I can attest that the school of hard knocks is a touch teacher. The knowledge gained from being actively involved in KAFMO and the STMA and the many excellent educational opportunities provided by Penn State and

others can make all the difference to you. As professionals it is our responsibility to use all of our resources to build a team of people committed to the vision of great fields and grounds. ■

Jeff White is former supervisor of grounds at Marietta College, Marietta, OH who now resides in Maryland.

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Tips on tarps

BROCK PHIPPS, Springfield Cardinals

I'm sure with a lot of minor league teams when it comes to dealing with the tarp, safety has to be the biggest priority. I always try to stress to our new employees how to handle the tarp with care yet respect what can happen in severe weather conditions. We have all been in that situation when the wind takes control and it's either protecting the field or protecting someone from getting hurt. I let my staff know that if you don't feel in control and your feet are coming off the ground it's probably time to let go.

At Hammons Field we have both the Missouri State Bears and the Springfield Cardinals using the facility. When the Bears are playing I use their players to cover the field with the tarp. On game day it's my staff, which consists of 6-7 members, along with the players and coaching staff. To pull the tarp during the Cardinals season, I use my staff along with the office staff. Communication is the key when dealing with both teams. When rain is approaching I will send out a text message or email just to let them know they will be needed. I have found that it's helpful to send out a notice before the season to all staff to have extra clothes on hand. There is nothing like working in the office with soggy clothes all day. Another key is to have the office staff stagger their lunch schedule; it's not a good feeling when bodies are needed and no one is around.

With minimal staff in the minor leagues one of the first things I ever did was to roll a rope into the tarp. Talk about saving time and some energy—when it's crunch time to place the tarp on the field during the game. To roll the tarp out we simply hook on with our utility vehicle and proceed to roll the tarp out. The tarp is positioned on the right field warning track. I like to have the tube positioned on the wall that when the tarp is rolled out it's one fold and go. This also enables half of the skin to be covered from the first fold. It's very important to pull the tarp with the seams.

Here at Hammons Field we have four tarp drains in shallow right field. This enables us to remove a lot of water in a short amount of time. It's always nice to have a little breeze in the right direction when it's time to remove the water. The air movement under the tarp makes it like adding 10 staff members to the tarp crew. After dumping the tarp in right field we then pull back across the infield and begin the folding process. We fold the tarp twice and then roll it up. It's very important to keep all the seams and

>> **Above: PULLING THE TARP AT HAMMONS FIELD**, home to the Missouri State Bears and Springfield Cardinals, maintained by Brock Phipps.

>> **Below: A SHELF CLOUD** looms over Hammond Field in Springfield, Missouri.



With minimal staff in the minor leagues one of the first things I ever did was to roll a rope into the tarp.

Talk about saving time and some energy—when it's crunch time to place the tarp on the field during the game.

edges straight to enable the next pull to go smoothly.

If we expect high wind I make sure the tarp is pulled tight in every direction. We surround the tarp and pull in every direction to accomplish this. Metal stakes anchor the tarp down and then equipment is placed on the four corners. I found that using stakes is the best and easiest way to anchor the tarp. Sand bags seem to drag along on the top of the tarp when wind begins to pick up and they are time consuming to put in place. If no wind is expected we then place two carpet drying fans on the first and third base side of the tarp and inflate the bottom side to the tarp. This has really helped with two problems: the first is this allows air movement and cuts down on disease; the other is it will help to shed some water off of the tarp. It's amazing what these can do with the short amount of time it takes to set them in place. Take care of your tarp and it will definitely save you time and labor when used correctly.

COREY RUSSELL, Myrtle Beach Pelicans

Last year in Myrtle Beach we had a total of 55 tarp pulls. These were either overnight, in game, during the day, etc. We only had to pull twice in-game for a short delay. For those in-game pulls we try to aim for 60-90 seconds to get the field covered and then worry about getting it bagged down.

Here at the beach with the coastal weather, we see a lot of our wet conditions as pop up thunderstorms off the water between 2 pm and 6 pm. So a lot of our concerns are whether or not to cancel batting practice and trying to get as much of our pre-game routine done before the tarp goes on if it looks like it we won't be able to get it off until closer to game time. We've put it out with 6 people and that is the BARE minimum. About 10 are what we shoot for. We actually had some bad rips in our tarp, some that got to be more than 100 feet long by the end of the



>> COREY RUSSELL leads his crew in repairing a torn tarp last summer in Myrtle Beach.



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>> **WITH ANOTHER COASTAL STORM CLEARED,** fans at a Myrtle Beach Pelicans game are treated to a rainbow.

season. This led to us going and retrieving the local high school's tarp for the last two home stands of the year.

I think the best way to handle your tarp is to just try and convey what you're trying to do to everyone as loudly and early as possible. The fewer people trying to lead the better. Usually my assistant and I are on each end of the tarp and we're the only ones giving out directions. No matter how many times you do it however, someone always forgets what the routine is, which is the downfall of not having an actual "tarp crew." It's everyone on deck here from the GM to the front office interns.

JOEY STEVENSON,
Indianapolis Indians

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>> **VICTORY FIELD**, home to the Indianapolis Indians, maintained by Joey Stevenson

down we have approximately 17-20. At full-tilt, I believe one of our best tarp times was 1 minute, 7 seconds. On average we are probably right around 90 seconds. We use 140 foot straps rolled up in the tarp, pulled by two people, with the remaining people pushing tarp. It really helps get the tarp off the wall and you don't have to "flip" the end of the tarp over the tube on the rollout. The BEST way to get the tarp out we found, is to tell the crew work hard for 90 seconds and then the pain is over! During non-game tarp pulls, we use a Gator to pull the tarp, which helps keep the crew fresh.

OPIE CHEEK, **Clearwater Threshers**

With our office staff and crew we have 12 people who can help with our tarp and we can get it on the field in 2 minutes. If there is water on the tarp, we just get a run-

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» **BRIGHT HOUSE FIELD**, home to the Clearwater Threshers, maintained by Opie Cheek.

ning start on pulling off the tarp, which gets the water moving and we dump it in the outfield. Then we put it back on the infield before folding it up.

KEITH WINTER, Fort Wayne Tincaps

Game day management—when in doubt, pull it! Compile the best and most trusted weather information you have at

your disposal, then trust your instincts. The longer you are in this business, the more you learn that your instincts are one of your greatest assets. On game days, when hundreds of thousands of dollars may be at stake, it is always better to be safe than sorry. The worst thing that can happen is you take a dry tarp off a field if it doesn't rain. Also, as you get closer to game time, be prepared! If BP is going on, talk to both teams about your tarp pull contingency plan so the field can be cleared as quickly as possible. Minutes equal dollars when it comes to protecting a game-day field.

We wrap a rope in our tarp and pull out the roll with a utility vehicle. This is faster than pushing the roll out by hand and doesn't necessitate having to get people in place to push. Once the tarp is rolled out, we can get it in position with 6-8 strong armed bodies, but I prefer 12-15 so that placement is perfect and time is saved. Our record from pull out to placement is about 90 seconds for an in-game pull.

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OTHER TARP MANAGEMENT IDEAS FROM KEITH WINTER

We inflate our tarp EVERYTIME with two large fans to keep air circulating under the tarp. Not only is this a turf disease prevention step, but the water also runs off the inflated tarp to the edges, making it quicker and easier to get the tarp back off the field. When the rain stops, we move excess water off with roller squeegees, and in most cases, don't have to take the time and drag all that infield conditioner

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>> **PARKVIEW FIELD**, home to the Fort Wayne Tincaps, maintained by Keith Winter

around by draining the tarp in another direction.

When we take the tarp off the field, I try to have enough front office personnel on hand to “hold up” the opposite side to keep from dragging so much conditioner off the baselines and skin. There will always be some piles after the fold, but lifting the folded edge helps. When rolling the tarp back on the roll, we have a narrow window in the visitor’s bullpen to place the tarp, so I make sure myself or one of my grounds crew is “aligning” the roll. A “bad roll” isn’t worth hurrying, because you know it always has to come back out again.

Finally, if you are inflating the tarp and the weather is threatening, make sure it is ultra-secure. We have foot-long tarp stakes at every grommet and put a piece of equipment on three corners. In the center field corner, we roll the tarp up in the roll almost to the edge of the skin, because I like Mother Nature to water as much grass as possible. ■

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