



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

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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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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 tough 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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