



PARK FOUNDATION

How to Create a Park Foundation

The Anchorage Model

Step 1: Hire Staff

The Anchorage Park Foundation was created after many years of community discussion, with the support of the new Parks and Recreation Director, Parks Commissioners, the Mayor, and the Anchorage Assembly. These entities worked to create a municipal position that would support the Anchorage Park Foundation, initially proposing that the Foundation should take about 25% of this new Development Director's time (the municipal portion of the job is called *Marketing and Community Involvement Director*).

Step 2: Build the System

In the first year a foundation will implement a variety of tasks to set up the system. This is low-profile work including:

- Bylaws
- Articles of Incorporation
- Mission/Vision/Goals
- Establish a Governing Board.
- Resolve governance structure questions, and complete your setup work with a Community Foundation.
- Launch Public Involvement Process. Early in our first year, our parks department initiated public involvement with key park user groups. Involvement confirmed Anchorage wants us to take better care of what we have. We used 2 surveys, 5 regional public workshops, key stakeholder interviews, and a citywide public workshop.
- Write a brief 18 month plan – mine was one page, but divided the work into manageable segments.
- Create a recognition plan.

Step 3: Celebrate

While setting up the system, use media opportunities to focus on celebrating past contributions to your park system. *We do not recommend an attempt to ask for financial contributions from the broader community in the early stages.* Options we used were:

- Hold big gift press conferences. We had two big gifts in the works before the Anchorage Park Foundation was created, and we used these opportunities to attract media attention.
- Host an event that highlights past contributions, such as our Park Founders Day. A "Park Founder" can be anyone who contributed money or significant energy to create a park or greenbelt. We made our event multigenerational, inviting all members of park founding families. This type of event is key. Your target audience is likely supporters, so you can keep the scope limited. Don't forget to:
 - Send letters to known park founders requesting the addresses of all family members in order to invite entire families to this special event.
 - Send personal invitations from Mayor.
 - Provide all generations of families with boutonnieres for special recognition at event.
 - Hire photographer for founding family portraits.
 - Invite all park user groups.
- Launch Website. Our website uses photos from Park Founders Day, and includes testimonials from a variety of park users called [My Favorite Anchorage Park and Why](#).

Step 4: Involve Volunteers

A healthy park system involves volunteers to develop community ownership.

- Launch [Clean & Green, Safe & Secure](#), based on community requests. We knew some groups just wanted paint and support to make park improvements. With little investment, we set our goals to host 4 *Clean & Greens* in each park district – the park district managers built up the community connections with the help of the volunteer coordinators. The Foundation paid for the materials and celebrated the results on the website, and with funders. We attracted some media attention for the work.

Step 5: Continue to Strengthen Community Relationships

A park foundation's success and sustainability rests on the community support it generates.

- Offer [Challenge Grants](#). During our second winter of operation we were fortunate enough to have a \$400,000 challenge grant from our major funder. We offered any group the opportunity to meet our challenge and provide up to \$40,000 per project with a labor/cash/materials match. We had 31 applications, and awarded 26 grants. Publicity followed, and relationships strengthened.
- Offer services to groups seeking to improve parks and trails:
 - Create a sub fund where supporters can conveniently deposit funds raised for their purpose.
 - Host a webpage on your site.
 - Link information to your site.
 - Provide contribution envelopes.
 - Provide various communication opportunities.
 - Apply for grants on their behalf
- Host *Park Summits*, where the Mayor invites key park user groups for discussions in advance of the legislative session. This led to our first direct legislative appropriation.

Step 6: Build Organizational Capacity

- Invest in relational database. As your donor base grows this will greatly increase your capacity to communicate effectively and efficiently.
- Print a catalog offering types of investments. This is a donor service only, and should not be seen as a fundraising strategy. If you include memorial benches and other options, this can expand your donor base and provide a nice public service.
- Invest in the stuff. Now you can get some water bottles and t-shirts for distribution. This is not a fundraising strategy, but can serve various purposes. We even created a parks and trails map with a major contribution from a corporation, building our relationship with a funder, and publicizing our Foundation with a much needed map.
- Hire a consultant to hold a governing board training to craft a strategic plan.
- Hire a consultant to hold a focus group that can react to concepts in your strategic plan, so you can create your next draft with this input. Your focus group audience can be hand picked from opinion leaders who are likely supporters. These people will appreciate being involved in this level of planning, without committing to becoming board members.

Step 7: Continue to Strengthen Community Relationships

- Generate positive publicity opportunities for community partners. Volunteers and Challenge Grantees appreciate the positive media attention.
- Create bond packages based on community priorities. Work with external groups to help carry messages.
- Accept invitations to apply for grants with natural resource agencies. We launched [Citizen Weeds Warriors](#) upon invitation, and built upon our relationships within the conservation community. Plus, it laid the groundwork for accepting federal funding.

Step 8: Celebrate

- Seek out celebrations such as park anniversaries and groundbreaking ceremonies. Partner with important agencies for their celebrations in your town.
- Continue personalizing park assets with *My Favorite Anchorage Park and Why*. Work with interns to conduct interviews.
- Host Parks and Natural Spaces Lecture Series. This energizes targeted populations.
- Publish Quarterly E-newsletter. Highlight champions on e-newsletter and on website. Promote events.
- Invite/Promote your allied public officials.

Step 9: Ask

Asking the broader community for financial contributions, small to large, is more expensive and more work than asking big donors for a financial commitment. It is important to all donors that the broader community accepts responsibility for the public assets, through taxes, financial contributions and volunteer labor. Celebrate, educate, and involve before you ask.

- First Direct Mail Campaign—tv, radio, posters, utility inserts.
- Board Members must follow up with personal calls.

Step 10: Build Organizational Capacity

- Adopt Purchasing Policy.
- Hire Landscape Architect on term contract.
- Issue Request for Proposals for construction services.

Step 11: Construction, Community Builds

Using volunteer labor for some of the work, even if you have a contractor prepare the site, will highlight the community support the project has.

- Follow through on funding generated using community labor and support:
 - Skate park built
 - KaBOOM! grant for multi use field
 - United Way Day of Caring

Next Steps for Anchorage

- Long Term Funding Strategy Polling, Workshop
- Hire Database Manager/Bookkeeper/Communications Specialist
- Offer Challenge Grants on 2 year cycles
- Leverage funding for improving soccer infrastructure
- Direct Builds
- Solidify structure to withstand political changes