SESSION TITLE : Making Organizations Financially Self Sufficient

CONVENER(S): Dave Hicks

PARTICIPANTS: Jim Schmidt, Jon Knechtel, Fred Davis, Bill Niedringhuas, Emily Nottingham, Liz Wessel

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS and/or RECOMMENDATIONS:
The four Scenic Trail Associations (Florida, Pacific NW, Potomac Heritage and Arizona Trail) discussed their means for producing funds to operate. The ATA is moving into a new stage as a result of Scenic Trail designation and that their trail will be completed in the next 1 1/2 year. As a result it is looking at how it will face the future with its current revenue stream. The other three trails discussed their means of operating and producing funds. Each were quite different…ranging from high dependency on the federal government to being purely volunteer….to producing revenue from trail construction/youth projects. Both the ATA and the PNW Trail are looking for some funding from the National Forest Service. Such funding is critical to the ATA as a result of their Director, a volunteer, planning to step down when the AZT is completed in 2011.

The sessions provided a good overview of the operations of each trail and their funding means. No recommendations were made as it was primarily an information and educational session.

WHY THIS SESSION: Dave Hicks is from a volunteer run and operated; trail almost complete. Need to transition –leadership and possibly structure (unpaid to paid)

IDEAS

- Look for long term funding from non-traditional funders; get commitments EX a commitment to fund 30K for a particular project; donor came back with a second gift
- Significant funding from private funders with multiyear commitments to a program (at risk youth)
- Took on projects/programs that had funding where the current lead organization could not finish
- the project and needed a project lead/administrator
- had the key staff/volunteers with the right backgrounds
- able to leverage funding to support the construction of the trail
- Built identity and trust relationship with funder
- Trail building can be a primary source of funds
- Federal funding
    - Use a good rate for indirect costs (30%) (some strings like no lobbying)
    - Need to “sell” your request (put a package together and deliver)
    - Become the reliable trusted partner; then when funds available, your organization is sought out
- to take on projects/funds
- Volunteer only with no federal support (3 groups along the trail; only 1 with interest in entire trail); supportive Congressional delegation to the point they make visits to land owners (EX: Dept of Defense)

- REI and EMS outdoor gear companies: source of volunteers; companies have programs for their customers (giving back to community)
- Need solid identity (branding) and solid core of trail maintainers; need support of local politicians and park authorities
- Variety and fun keep burnout at bay
- Go where you can make progress (building about 5 miles of new tail per year); don't get bogged down
- Chapters are independent for funds; makes for less tension
- Membership: can be a steady source of funds
- Student work team: 26000 hours of work; need strong supervisors; reward return workers and develop them

CHALLENGES

- Reliance on one or two large funders
- Unsuccessful fundraising efforts
- No growth in membership; growth in average age of members
- Getting beyond trail maintenance to programs
- Office is not located where the donors are located

RECOMMENDATION for PNTS ACTION: None