

HOW TO OBTAIN FUNDING

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Here are several concrete suggestions that *really work* for obtaining funding regardless whether it is for a salary line item or funds for new equipment:

1. First, realize that simply being really good at running your planetarium lessons/shows is not enough in these modern times of board directors often with their own agendas, tight fiscal management and sometimes unsympathetic administrators.
2. Begin by doing some “funding detective work.” Find out who the key players are in your institution, who are the budget decision makers, who are the influential members of your board, who are the influential members of the local community, and who are some local astronomers/scientists who would be willing to lend their expertise and “schmoozing.”
3. Once you've done that, set up the “The (Insert your planetarium's name) Joint Task Force.” Ask one your most positive members in that group to chair the illustrious committee and lay out the following goals to which they will certainly add:
 - Identify the Main Mission of the Planetarium (with respect to the body of people it serves). Get them excited about the wonderful “possibilities when we all work together to make the dream come true!”
 - Set short term goals and long term goals (one of those will, of course, be the items that are the most important to you and the group... whether it is money for a new gadget, a new building wing or “making salary commensurate with position”... that's when you show your overhead transparency listing the data from other planetariums who do manage to pay a decent wage).
 - Identify resources to reach those goals (both in “people resources” and “funding resources”).
 - Follow up with additional “campaign” meetings.

The key to this whole process is what you do BEFORE you have this first meeting, and heed this advice carefully: PERSONALLY meet with as many of the members individually and let them talk first about what THEY see as the future of the planetarium and how best to improve its service/mission. Then bend their ear with some of your personal stories about your efforts and your dreams. Before leaving, elicit their support so when the “funding” question comes up during the meetings you already have members in favor of that request that might influence others. It is good public relations to follow up with short visits, phone calls or a brief note thanking them for their valuable time, talent and input.

In short, there is more to keeping your planetarium alive than knowing astronomy. Good luck to each of you!

(P.S. it worked for me. In the time I was at the Goddard Planetarium we completely renovated the facility and purchased thousands of dollars of equipment and had a pay raise from the museum.)

At St. Mark’s School of Texas Planetarium, a private boys’ school where I presently work, I also had to do my homework on sources of funding. Being graciously assertive has been the key.

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