

Sustainable Funding

Lessons from the Field on Vacant Lot Greening

Major federal investments in demolition over the last decade converted thousands of vacant and abandoned buildings into vacant lots. However, funding to maintain and green these lots has not increased. 75% of survey respondents indicated that sustainable funding was among their top three needs to meet the rising demand for vacant land maintenance and greening.

Why Sustainable Funding Matters

1. Demonstrates Commitment

Vacant lots are not only growing in number but actually outnumber vacant structures in inventories across the country. Investing in vacant lots recognizes the changing nature of vacancy in communities and signals a commitment to ensuring vacant lots are an asset.

"We need funding to address things like beautification efforts; at the end of the day, a greening project will not get precedence over a rehabilitation or a demolition project."

"We need to find a dedicated funding source for greening, as well as funding for beautification of longtime vacant lots, which we have in abundance."

2. Builds Essential Capacity

Effective management of vacant land requires a dedicated investment. Organizations need reliable sources of funding for current operations and anticipated future needs.

"Capacity challenges stemming from inadequate funding are the most formidable barriers to land revitalization and maintenance"



"We need time to build and execute policies that make our team more efficient and effective in the work – this is something we are working to develop as our capacity allows but funding for personnel and staff capacity are significant barriers."

3. Encourages Intentional and Long-Term Solutions

Pilot program and ad hoc projects are not enough to address the systemic, growing nature of vacant land. Organizations need long-term funding for strategic planning, implementation, and maintenance to ensure they can operate intentionally and effectively.

"Stable multi-year funding for the overall organization operations would enable us to plan better for larger projects, assembly, etc."

"Funders are most interested in new projects, it is so hard to find funding to maintain projects we've already done."

"Our top need is consistent funding for ongoing maintenance and site improvements."

4. Supports Mission-Driven Work

Long-term, flexible funding is vital to help organizations stay focused on their mission, problem solve more effectively, and respond to dynamic community needs and priorities over time.

"We need a reliable funding source that allows us to be mission, rather than project, focused."

"Flexibility and spending autonomy is another asset that is critical to our work....This flexibility means that we can address key community priorities."



Practitioner Insights

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Think Ahead to Future Needs in Funding Requests

Build your budgets and grant requests to include resources for future maintenance. This helps to ensure that project investments last longer.

"We learned that we needed to ask for additional funds for the upkeep of our projects to ensure they will last."

"Just like a building needs ongoing and routine maintenance once it has been built, so does an active greenspace, and we need to remember and plan for that up front or else we'll have to do it again in another few years."

Engage Multiple Interests and Build Shared Value

When organizational partners from across various sectors work together, they often have more resources to allocate toward the work than either could raise alone, resulting in greater impact.

"One of our most successful projects was a youth playspace with stormwater and a food garden. Not only did the neighborhood youth have a place to play and learn, we were able to tap into three sources of funding to get the work done."

Invest Locally

Reclaiming materials from the waste stream and sourcing materials locally helps cut costs and results in added environmental and economic benefits from vacant land projects.

"We often source materials from community yard sales, which reduces our materials cost in our projects. We have also been known to reincorporate wasted materials such as tires, bricks, and other debris."

"When working in different communities, we inventory local hardware stores, nurseries, and other businesses where we can source materials."



The Keys to Success guides are companion products to *America's Vacant Lot Landscape: Insights from the National Survey on Greening*, which can be found at www.communityprogress.org/vacantland.

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