

# Gaining Support for Your Project

How you propose your project to potential supporters, decision-makers, and potential funders, is as important as the nature of your proposal. Gather facts and develop a narrative to convince others that your idea is worthy of their consideration. Communicating your goals clearly, concisely and effectively is essential to securing support.

Here are the key areas to consider as you formulate your presentation.

## DEVELOP A NARRATIVE/STORY

- Clearly identify a specific proposal. The proposal may be a capital building project, such as new tennis courts or adding bathrooms, or a new program, like hosting a tournament for local league players.
- Calculate the cost of your project. The USTA and local governments have resources available to assist you in this determination.
- Know your weight. Be able to quote the number of people or voters supporting the project—through signed petitions, letters or individual lobbying efforts and having supporters attend meetings. The broader your base of support, the better your chances for success.
- Be prepared to offer fundraising assistance. An increase in fees may be necessary to pay for new programming. Help local officials apply for grants to offset some of the cost of your project. Offer to raise money locally to offset public funds; it shows the level of interest and support for the project. Public-private partnerships may be viewed favorably. More information can be found in the Funding Your Project section of this manual.



## IDENTIFY YOUR ALLIES AND SUPPORTERS

- Form a committee of fellow advocates. Include a millennial or someone savvy about social media to help advance the cause.
- Look to your local tennis groups for support, such as Community Tennis Associations (CTAs), National Junior Tennis and Learning programs (NJTLs), Tennis Service Representatives (TSRs), area tennis clubs and facilities, tennis retailers, local sport/court-construction companies, tennis professionals and players.
- The geographic community that is impacted by your proposal will add important citizen support. Neighborhood groups, Advisory Councils, planning and zoning officials, and law enforcement groups should be cultivated for input.
- Find other organizations and non-profits that share or have similar interests. There is power in numbers. Such organizations include, but are not limited to:
  - Healthcare agencies and local hospitals, medical groups, physical therapy providers, recreational therapist
  - Youth-serving non-profits (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA/YWCA) along with adult agencies, such as senior centers
  - Media outlets, including newspapers, local magazines, radio and TV stations, local news websites (i.e. Patch)
  - Faith leaders and places of worship
- Engage educational organizations, such as school board members, parent-teacher organizations, athletic booster clubs, tennis coaches and team players, local college presidents, trustees, athletic departments and Tennis On Campus players.
- Speak to local business leaders, politicians and influential community leaders about your project. Attend local Chamber of Commerce meetings. Talk with the local Convention & Visitors Bureau and/or local Sports Commission.
- Find out if any local leaders play tennis.
- Cultivate city/county managers, and Parks and Recreation staff and advisory boards. Such administrative staff and appointed officials can be key supporters in your efforts, assisting with research, data and other information that will help you succeed.

## BUILD A TEAM

After identifying allies and supporters, such as others who utilize the park space, work with them to achieve your goals. By joining with others who have similar priorities, you establish that tennis has broad community support. Building a coalition:

- Increases your appeal
- Creates networking and partnership opportunities between you, your organization and partner organizations
- Can provide cost effectiveness; you can share duties and resources
- Has a greater potential to attract media attention
- Offers greater access to expertise by calling on a range of organizations and individuals

## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

You will present your project idea to a variety of audiences to gain support. While much of the information you present to each group will be the same, you'll need to tailor each presentation to the particular organization, such as to a community group, a league of tennis players, local business leaders or elected officials.

It is important to focus on the specific concerns of each audience, and how your project can help solve some of the problems facing the community. The goal is to sell your story, but more importantly, to highlight the key messaging points that contribute to building a better community. Think about communicating the overall big picture.

### **Community Groups, Tennis Players and Local Business Leaders**

- What are the economic, social and health benefits of your proposal to this audience?
- What are you asking these people to do to support your project? Are you looking for monetary contributions, or names to put on a petition?
- Find out if any attendees have personal relationships with elected officials. Ask them for advice and assistance in meeting with their contacts. Ask them for a personal introduction to decision-makers.

### **Local Public Officials and Staff**

- Learn the names and responsibilities of the public officials and staff members you want to influence.
- Review the department or agency's strategic plan and budget to determine its goals.
- Understand the local pressures and pressure points.
- Learn the budget cycle.
- Get the calendar and schedule for meetings, planning sessions and public hearings.

### **Local Elected Officials**

- Learn the names of each elected official you seek to influence.
- Find out on which board/council committee each elected official serves.
- Identify the elected official representing the area that will be affected by your project.
- Review the board/council strategic plan and budget to determine its goals.
- Learn the budget cycle.
- Get the calendar and schedule for meetings, planning sessions and public hearings.
- Understand the local pressures and pressure points.
- Learn about each officials' interests that relate to your message. Are they interested in economic development? Park enhancements? Children? Crime prevention?

## **DEVISE AN ACTION PLAN**

Now that you have an understanding of your local government and how it works, you are ready to develop your action plan for success. You will be presenting your project to your elected officials in both private and public settings. It is important to understand local open public meetings law so you do not put your elected officials in awkward positions. Here are some basics to keep in mind as you move forward:

- In most cases, you only need a majority to win support for your project.
- Attend or watch public meetings to understand the dynamics of the board/council you seek to influence.
- Identify the board member/councilor who will act as your "sponsor" on the board/council to introduce motions.
- Meet separately with each of the board/council members, tailoring your message toward his/her areas of interest.
- Be involved in various community projects to demonstrate that you're involved in the community outside of just tennis.

## **COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS IN PRIVATE**

Now that you have developed your message, identified potential supporters and researched potential costs, it is time to communicate your idea. It is important to be knowledgeable, direct and succinct. Do your research in advance so you are prepared to handle all eventualities. Here are some things to keep in mind as you reach out to elected officials.

### **TIPS BEFORE CONTACTING AN ELECTED OFFICIAL FOR A PRIVATE MEETING**

- Identify key supporting constituents and any other connections (family, friend, business, etc.).
- Contact the elected official's key local constituents/allies and ask them to attend a meeting with you. It is important to have a wide base of support for your project.
- Have a goal for a personal meeting time and date, with alternatives.
- Lock in meeting date and time.
- Develop a consistent communication plan: letters, phone calls and meetings.

### **EFFECTIVE WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATIONS**

- Confine each communication to one focused topic.
- Include the most relevant basic facts.
- Have all key information in place. Don't assume they know the background.
- Stay positive, friendly and receptive. Always remember to say "Please" and "Thank You."
- Make communication stand out by being personal, thoughtful and passionate.
- Ask for a response.
- Be willing to do further research to find and report answers to any questions they ask.
- Keep a record of all communication with each decision-maker.
- Send a thank-you note after each meeting.
- If there is no response, wait two weeks and check back. Persistence pays off.

Keep your supporters and stakeholders informed about the ongoing advocacy efforts, so they will feel a sense of involvement. Small successes along the way will hold your group together and encourage future efforts.

## **COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS IN PUBLIC MEETINGS**

Public meetings require different preparation and presentations. The following advice will help you be effective at a public hearing:

- Watch public meetings, and read published meeting minutes, before you sign up to speak at one. You will gain valuable information about procedures, time limits and what is or is not effective as a talking point. Every local public body is different and has its own dynamic.
- Assign someone to act as your spokesperson.
- Show support with a large, visible turnout. Everyone can wear the same color T-shirt, raise a tennis racquet, or have some other method of identification. If your project involves children, bring them.
- Prepare written comments for any public meeting at which you make a presentation. Give your written comments to the Clerk for the public record.

- Remember: Public forums are for presenting information. Most decisions are not made at public hearings.
- Follow your project to wherever it is referred. Many communities have a Parks and Recreation Citizen Advisory Board that may need to consider your proposal. Councils/Commissions have committees to hear more details about proposed projects. Any time your project appears on a committee agenda, there must be at least one representative of your group present to show support and answer questions.

## **KEEP MOMENTUM ALIVE**

Ambitious projects requiring public funding take a long time to develop and gain support. Be prepared to promote and defend your ideas for the long haul. Be tenacious. It is not unusual for a project to take years to be funded and constructed. Pay attention to local political elections, as you may need to introduce your project to newly elected officials during that time.

Keep your stakeholders and supporters involved and informed as your project goes through the system and gains support. Public officials watch closely to see which ideas have real community commitment and which do not. Invite elected officials to tennis events. Attend public functions, such as the ribbon-cutting of a new building, to demonstrate community support and stay in front of your elected officials.

