



Starting a Groundwork Trust in Your Community: Questions & Answers

During and following the “Starting a Groundwork Trust in Your Community” webinar, we received great questions about the Request for Proposals and overall process for starting a Groundwork Trust. We are sharing these questions and answers below and will continue to post additional questions and answers here as they come in. Be sure to check back periodically for updates!

Funding/Finances

Q: Can the local match of \$35,000 come from a local government entity or authority other than the municipal government itself?

A: Yes, the match can come from a local government entity or authority as long as the highest ranking municipal government official supports and commits to being an active partner in the development and sustainment of a local Groundwork Trust. This official must submit a letter of support.

Q: Can the \$35,000 local match be in the form of federal funds?

A: EPA or National Park Service funding cannot be used for the match. Community Block Grants, which have been utilized in the past, are generally categorized as local or state government funding. Community Block Grants originate from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Q: Are local Trusts on their own to secure funding after the initial 3 to 4 years?

A: For the most part, yes, newly developed Trusts are on their own to secure funding after the initial 3 to 4 years. Groundwork USA does provide a certain amount of fundraising, coaching, and support. We have been able to access more national funding each year; however, any amount of funding Groundwork USA is able to contribute to local Trusts is a small portion of an individual Groundwork Trust budget.

Q: What is the typical Groundwork Trust budget following start-up years?

A: We have established Groundwork Trust milestones that contemplate having Groundwork Trusts achieve a budget of \$250,000 by the third year of operation. We have concluded that this is the level of budget needed to have a viable organization that is able

to grow and continue to accomplish community projects and programs. Established Groundwork Trusts budgets vary and have a budget of anywhere between \$500,000 to \$3 million.

Operations & Organizational Structure

Q: What are the different governance models in use throughout the Groundwork Network? Are municipalities typically involved? If so, what kinds of offices or divisions?

A: It is typical for representatives from the municipal government to participate in the Steering Committee, and they also tend to be a part of the Board of Directors at Groundwork Trusts. The relationship between the local/municipal government and a Groundwork Trust is very complex and looks different for each Trust. For example, when Groundwork Trusts are acting in the role of a builder or planner of a new community asset/project (e.g., park, community garden) there is very significant collaboration. Another example is our Green Team programming, which tends to be supported by the local government. Specifically, a Groundwork Trust might be working with local workforce investment boards.

Q: Does the sponsor for the potential Groundwork Trust need to be a 501(c)(3) or could the sponsor be a local development corporation, 501c4, etc.?

A: Groundwork USA is more interested in the attributes and capabilities a leading organization brings to the table than their particular structure. Once a Trust is established, they have historically been a 501(c)(3) structure for financial sustainability reasons (i.e., the ability to accept tax-exempt donations and grants).

Q: Is it typical for a local Groundwork Trust to need to hire a full-time staff person or are all of the projects handled cooperatively by the individuals who assisted in starting up the new Trust (Steering Committee)?

A: Yes, it is essential that a person is hired to solely focus on the new Groundwork Trust. If there can be dedicated time from a portion of staff from existing organizations, that would be helpful, but not viable on its own. This is also reflected in our organizational benchmarks/milestones that have been established for new Trusts.

Trust Geography

Q: When choosing a community for a Groundwork Trust, how much weight is put on geography?
NOTE: This question was received during our “Starting a Groundwork Trust in your Community” webinar. Specifically referenced was the cluster of Groundwork Trusts in the Northeast—Massachusetts in particular—and if this would negatively impact an applicant from the region.

A: Groundwork USA and our partners are interested in geographic diversity but more importantly, we are interested in places that are a good fit to advance the Groundwork USA mission and have the spark of potential. In regards to developing a Trust in Massachusetts, the best place to start would be contacting us. Current Massachusetts Groundwork Trusts are developing a common framework among themselves and there may be potential for expansion in Massachusetts outside of this ongoing Trust development process.

Q: Generally, at what community level are Groundwork Trusts operating on (e.g., neighborhood, town, city)?

A: A number of our Trusts are located in mid-sized cities ranging with populations from about 75,000 to 200,000. Typically, these Trusts have a scope that is city-wide or extends beyond city boundaries into adjacent communities. In larger metropolitan areas such as Denver or Washington, DC, the Trusts typically operate at the neighborhood level focusing on lower-income neighborhoods throughout the city.

Q: What is the smallest community with a Groundwork Trust? Does Groundwork work in or focus on smaller communities, such as a population of 20,000?

A: Communities with smaller populations would present some challenges, such as cultivating a critical mass to sustain a Groundwork Trust over time. We are certainly aware of the needs in small communities around the country and are receptive to the idea of making a Trust in a smaller community work, but would have to think about sustainability over time. The Groundwork Trust with the smallest population is Groundwork Lawrence with a population of 80,000.

Community Support & Steering Committee

Q: Given the intense effort that goes into developing a steering committee and associated tasks to submitting a letter of interest, it feels too tight of a timeframe for my community to convene a steering committee and submit a robust letter of interest. Is there potential to have continued conversations with a Groundwork staff member if one were to be at a baseline of highly exploratory and attempting to convene potential committee members?

A: We recognize getting to the point of being able to submit a letter of interest can take significant effort and time. The process for developing a new Groundwork Trust occurs roughly on an annual basis. We always encourage communities who are not quite ready to submit a letter of interest this year to keep at it and plan for submitting the following year. We are more than happy to work with communities in the meantime as they consider

submitting a letter of interest. It is also possible communities that fall into this category might benefit from our [Equitable Development Technical Assistance](#) program.

Q: In terms of the letters of support, if a community does not have buy-in from a municipal agency but does have support from the mayor or other local chief official, does this rule out a community?

A: No, if the chief elected official is supportive and is prepared to make the financial commitment, this presents no challenges.