

The goals of your student organization may revolve around student involvement in the community, promoting the sustainable use of water resources, or many other noble causes. However, in practice, fundraising will likely be a critical activity—funding enables your group to set and accomplish ambitious goals. There are many approaches to obtaining funding or sponsorship for your group. The following sections outline a few ideas, tips, and best-practices and points to a few specific examples that have been successful for particular student organizations and individuals.

This document is organized into these general recommendations:

1. Do your homework
2. Be professional
3. Identify opportunities within your university
4. Make contact with potential external sources
5. Develop and maintain long-lasting relationships

Do your homework

For your community to get the most out of your organization, and vice versa, it is important that you think about your target audience. Consider the goals, interests, and particular skills of your organization and how that can fit in with the needs and interests of outside parties that may be able to provide funding and benefit from interactions with your group. To help get you started, consider the following questions:

- What are the water-related needs and interests of your college or university? What about the surrounding community? For example, are water rights a pressing local issue?
- How is water used in your area? For example, recreational, agricultural, industrial, etc.
- Does your university, city, state, etc. have any strategic initiatives or organizations that focus on water issues? If so, who sponsors and participates in them?
- Is your campus visited/recruited by large industrial corporations? Perhaps you have better ties to smaller local or regional companies or municipalities?

As you develop a list of contacts (more on this later), think about their interests and needs. For example, a company might be looking for a leg up on campus recruiting. A college or department might be trying to increase undergraduate interest in a new master's degree program.

Be professional

Student organizations naturally have high turnover rates. If you're not careful, this could appear from the outside like a lack of organization. Combat these perceptions by making your organization look professional and consistent. Develop materials such as standardized letterhead, forms, etc. that will be

handed down from one years' officers to the next. If you don't already have one, obtain a permanent email address from your university or from WEF (e.g. WEFchapter@university.edu or Somewhere.University@wef.org) and use it for official correspondence with sponsors instead of your personal email address. That way, even when the officers change, sponsors will know how to get in contact with your group.

Develop a budget

It is very important that your organization develops a budget. This may be required by your university; even if it is not required, it will be very helpful when you begin to request funding. The exercise of establishing a yearly budget will help prepare you for conversations with potential sponsors about how much funding you need and how that funding will be put to use. Consider also preparing separate, more detailed budgets for major projects, events, or trips.

For example, if your chapter is looking to an event such as WEFTEC, having a detailed budget will help increase your ability to get funding to attend.

Example WEFTEC Budget Categories and Tips

- **Registration** – Heavily discounted for students!!!
- **Flight** – Book early to avoid increased prices closer to the event
- **Local Transportation** – Taxis, Buses, Car Rentals
- **Hotel** – Ask other student organizations or WEF staff about discount hotels close to the venue
- **Food** – There is free food in the Student Lounge at WEFTEC! As a student, be sure to take advantage of this! Typically, the student lounge is located in the immediate vicinity of the Student Design Competition.

Document your organization

It may also be beneficial to develop some other documentation that can be shared with potential funding sources, to show who you are as an organization and how you can successfully use sponsorship to accomplish your goals. A few examples of information or documents you might want to develop are:

- A mission statement and description of your organization's overall goals and objectives. Who are you as an organization? What are you trying to accomplish, in a broad sense?
- A list of specific goals and activities for the coming semester or year. Think about how you will judge success and what specific resources you need (funding, personnel, time, etc.) for each goal. This will help potential funding sources understand what they will be supporting.

- A list of significant past goals or events that your organization has successfully completed. This can help potential sponsors see clearly how their support will be used to deliver real results.
- Some basic statistics on your current membership. Approximately how many members do you have? What department(s) do they belong to?
- Information about your past members, if available. How many alumni of your chapter are there? Are there any major sectors or specific companies they now work for?
- If possible, gather a few quotes from people who have been involved with your organization in the past. For example, quotes from alumni about how your organization helped prepare them for a successful career or a quote from a university or community official about how your organization has created a positive impact.
- Develop a “sales pitch”. Start by putting together a few high-quality, professional slides that summarize the information listed in this section. This slide presentation might be useful for meetings with university officials or more formal meetings with company representatives. However, you should also develop an “elevator pitch”, which is a very short (maximum 1 minute) verbal description of who you are, your specific funding needs, the impact that funding will have, and how the sponsoring organization can benefit in return.

Be prepared

When meeting with potential sponsors, either inside or outside your university, make sure you come prepared. Review and update the documents/information listed above before important meetings. Consider bringing printouts to share when you meet with potential sponsors; this will give them some information to take with them that will remind them and their colleagues of the great work your organization is doing. Just be sure to make handouts concise and well organized; the idea is to give them a sheet or pamphlet to take with them that can be quickly reviewed or shared with others, not a document that contains every detail.

Identify opportunities within your university

No matter how many students the campus has, a university can be difficult for student organizations to navigate. It can be overwhelming to work with a University due to the fact that there are multiple sources for support at different levels throughout the institution.

Student Activities Office

The first stop for many student organizations is their university administration or student government. Each university has a different system for student activities. Your organization’s officers are likely already familiar with the system at your university, since they generally have to re-register the

organization each semester or year. Student groups are generally organized by a Student Affairs, Student Life, or Student Activities department, or they may fall under the Student Government. If you are unsure, browse your university's website or ask around to find out where to go for information on student organizations.

Some universities offer funding for student groups to cover basic costs or to fund special events. Some also offer in-kind (non-monetary) support that can help you use your existing funding more effectively. Examples include office space, printing or advertising services, and dedicated student organization bank accounts (in fact, some schools *require* that you keep funds in a university account).

In order to qualify for funding and other support, most universities evaluate student organizations and their activities. Some do this qualitatively, by comparing against a set of guidelines for student involvement. Others use a quantitative system to score organizations and activities based on various metrics. Whatever the system, do your research to learn how to effectively plug your organization in with the resources offered by your university. Use the documentation recommended in the previous section to help demonstrate how your group has effectively used funding in the past and to put together compelling applications for future funding.

Colleges and Departments

While the student activities offices may be able to provide some level support, their mission is supporting all of the recognized student organizations on campus. Your next stop should generally be the colleges and departments in your university that share your organization's specific interests. Typically for WEF student chapters—but not always—this will mean the College of Engineering, Civil/Environmental Engineering Department, Environmental Science Department, etc.

If possible, schedule a meeting with the dean or assistant dean of your college to discuss possible funding opportunities. Depending on how formal the college is, you might discuss this approach with your group's faculty sponsor to determine the right person in the dean's office to contact. Use the documentation discussed above to present your organization's vision, objectives, goals and budgets for the upcoming year and the future. Do some research before your meeting to determine the particular areas of overlap between your organization and the college's interests and initiatives. And remember to ask for input and advice, not just money, when you meet with university officials.

Use the same approach—along with the tips below—to discuss opportunities with department chairs, program advisors, and other officials in your university. Water is a broad and incredibly important topic! Use that breadth of interest to your advantage by branching out beyond your own academic department and college.

Tips and Suggestions

- Try to attract members (and even officers) from multiple departments and colleges. This will give you a chance to ask for funding from multiple sources—a college or department is much more likely

to give funding if its students are involved in the organization. Below is a partial list of colleges, departments, and programs whose students and faculty may have some interest in water issues. Find out how and where these departments and colleges post announcements (digitally or physically) and consider periodically advertising outside your main academic program.

- College of Engineering
 - Environmental Engineering
 - Civil Engineering, if separate
 - Chemical Engineering
 - Mechanical Engineering
 - College of Science
 - Environmental Science/Studies
 - Geoscience/Earth Science
 - Ecology
 - Wildlife/Fisheries Sciences
 - Environmental Law
 - Public Policy
 - Economics & Business Strategies
-
- Some universities have special environmental/sustainability institutes or colleges (for example, Sustainability Institute, School of Natural Resources, etc.). Don't forget to look for opportunities to interact with these institutions at your university.
 - Some universities have a separate graduate college or graduate school—for example, a Civil Engineering master's degree student might be co-enrolled in the College of Engineering and the Graduate College. If this is the case in your university, make sure any of your graduate student members also check with the graduate school for additional funding sources, such as conference travel grants.
 - Consider requesting performance-based funding. For example, if a department chair is hesitant to commit to a substantial amount of funding, perhaps they would be willing to give a small amount now and then increase that amount if you meet certain goals or milestones. These performance-based sponsorships could be structured around any of your goals or objectives: increasing active membership, successfully completing a project or hosting an event, etc. Not only does this give you a future funding source, it also creates extra incentives for your members to work hard to achieve your goals and for the department to take notice of your accomplishments!

Make contact with potential external sources

While there may be substantial funding available within your university, most organizations will also find it valuable to seek sponsorship from external sources. In addition to providing resources, establishing relationships with external organizations increases your engagement with the community and the professional fields your members are preparing to work in.

The first step to seeking funding or sponsorship from external sources is to develop a list of contacts. The following suggestions are only a few of the many ways to make contact with people outside your university.

- Connect with companies at campus career fairs and external conferences. Invite them to give a presentation to your organization about their company or industry. Companies are always looking for a way to differentiate themselves among the competition for top talent.
- Consider your chapter's alumni. Where do they go to work after graduation? Contact your alumni directly and see if they would be willing to work inside their company to obtain funding for you. If they are not the correct person, ask them to put you in contact with someone else in their company who can talk to you about potential sponsorship. Some companies, particularly very large ones, have university relations departments who have discretionary funds to sponsor some student groups. Many times the difficult part is simply finding the right person in a large organization.
- When you go to regional or national events, ask other student chapters what has been successful for them. You don't want to compete with each other for funding, but sharing ideas can be beneficial for both of your organizations. For example, another chapter may be able to tell you that the local branch of a company has been a good sponsor for them and that you might have success in reaching out to the same company if they have a regional office in your area.
- Reach out to your local Member Association (MA) through WEF. These associations have their own funding set up through WEF and local companies and are a great resource for students looking to represent the WEF organization at events such as WEFTEC or even local water events with consultants and operators. Member Associations often help fund students from their respective regions with events such as the Student Paper Competition and the Student Design Competition which both occur at WEFTEC every year. Contact your local MA Chair to find out if funds are available for your group!

Whatever methods you use, make sure you compile a list so it can be passed on to next year's officers. Try to maintain general contact information for each company (e.g. generic email addresses like info@company.com) as well as individual, personal contacts at the company.

Develop and Maintain Long-Lasting Relationships

Building and maintaining relationships with potential sponsors is critical to obtaining funding now and in the future. This includes—but goes well beyond—requesting sponsorship. Whether a company is or is not able to fund your request, develop an on-going conversation with them. A company may not be able to contribute when you request funding, but if your organization can develop a good continuing relationship with them, you will be in a good position to receive funding in the future when their situation changes. Consider the following suggestions:

- Some student organizations have had success with very direct requests for funding, for example sending letters to alumni and companies with a request for funding or sponsorship of their chapter. These letters can include a general request to sponsor the chapter or they can be structured around a specific request—for example, sponsoring members’ travel or registration to a conference. The letters can also be combined with an invitation to attend an event hosted by the organization. Thank you to the North Dakota State University AWWA/WEF student chapter for providing the example letters included at the end of this document.
- Some student organizations publish a periodic newsletter and use this as an opportunity to request sponsorship. For example, the Clarkson University student chapter of the New York Water Environment Association uses such a newsletter as their primary method of fundraising. They include write-ups of events, conferences, etc. they’ve been involved with and details about future events and goals they are planning. To raise funds, they sell ad space in the newsletter and are sure to always include a few blank ad spots with a “your ad could go here!” message. You might also choose to include a summary or list of sponsorship opportunities for companies who would like to contribute funds to sponsor specific activities. The newsletter is sent to chapter alumni and professionals they’ve worked or networked with. They also include a section with bios of the student authors who have contributed articles to the newsletter. This is beneficial to companies who may be looking to recruit students, which in turn creates an incentive for students to want to contribute articles.
- When requesting sponsorships for conferences or other events, make sure you document how students will benefit from the conference. Include this information in requests for conference funding.
- If possible, do some research on the company you are contacting. When does their fiscal year begin? When do they put together budgets, particularly for campus events and donations? What, if anything, would they like to gain from a relationship with your organization or your school in general? If the company has alumni from your group, they may be able to help you address these questions.

- Consider holding a large funding drive once a year. Produce a letter or brochure that advertises what you hope to accomplish in the coming year, and all the areas in which a company can help you by funding different events or projects. This will give some choice to companies or organizations that have specific interests. Follow this up with requests to fund specific events or projects as they occur throughout the year.
- Consider sending out requests for spring semester funding in early December. Many companies' fiscal years are aligned with the calendar year, and they sometimes have funds left in December that have been budgeted but not yet spent.
- Compile a short list or description of the benefits each sponsor's funding provided to the organization. Send an individualized thank you letter to each sponsor with this information after their donation or after the event they have sponsored. Consider also sending a mass-distributed letter or newsletter to your mailing list, publicly thanking all your sponsors. Do not disclose the amounts donated by each company; however, you can choose to have "funding levels" (e.g. bronze, silver, gold).
- It is recommended to mail a physical thank you letter, which can be displayed on a company bulletin board or in a break room. In addition to this, follow-up with your each of your contacts at the company via email. Thank them again for their company's support and for their help in obtaining the sponsorship. Provide a summary of what the funding will allow your organization to accomplish. Ask them what benefits, if any, they hope their company will get from the relationship with your student organization. Lastly, ask them how they think you can improve your organization to better serve their company and the community in general.
- Remember that, while companies generally do want to be altruistic, they still benefit from seeing the return on their investment in your organization. In addition to documenting what their support will enable you to do, you should also document the tangible benefits to the company. For example, you might point out that the sponsoring companies logos will be displayed on event advertisements, increasing their visibility among your members and across campus.
- Document correspondence with each of your sponsors and pass this information along to the next set of officers. Make sure to document what seemed to work well AND what didn't work. Keep track of any preferences they've expressed, such as what types of events they would like to be involved with. Each time you send a request to a company, review the recent correspondence and see if there are any relevant details to follow-up on or mention. This attention to detail will go a long way to demonstrating that your organization is professional and worthy of funding. For example:



"Dear Mrs. Smith,

When we spoke last March you indicated that your company would be interested in sponsoring a water policy forum. We appreciate your input and this year we are happy to present the First Annual Student Water Policy Forum. I would like to extend an invitation to you and your colleagues to attend and to ask if your company is still interested in sponsoring the event."

Other Helpful Resources

Looking for things like brochures, membership applications, sample publications? Call the WEF Customer Services Center at 1-800-666-0206 to get any material you might need.

WEF Student Contact: Caroline Pakenham (cpakenham@wef.org); Phone: 703-684-2400 x7220

APPENDIX A:

Example Letter:



4/14/2015

«AddressBlock»

RE: Invitation and Request for Sponsorship for Students and Young Professionals Reception

«GreetingLine»

I hope you are enjoying a fine summer! We would like to extend an invitation for you to attend and sponsor the Students and Young Professionals Reception at this year's North Dakota Water and Pollution Control Conference (NDWPCC) in Fargo, ND. This event provides a networking opportunity for students and young professionals to socialize with colleagues who share their passion of the water industry. In addition, the reception offers industry leaders a chance to recruit active and ambitious young engineers.

The reception will be held at Buffalo Wild Wings in South Fargo following the conference program on Tuesday, October 14. In order for the Students and Young Professionals Reception to be a success, support from companies such as «Company» is essential. A Monetary donation of \$100 will be recognized on a sponsorship poster that will be displayed at the reception and at the conference. If you have any questions or concerns about the reception or the request for sponsorship, please contact me at (701)-641-8759 or kellen_grubb@my.ndsu.edu.

Donations to fund the reception can be sent to Kellen Grubb no later than September 30th to allow time to budget and prepare for the event:

NDSU Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering
Attn: Kellen Grubb, Treasurer, AWWA/WEF Student Chapter
NDSU Dept. 2470
P.O. BOX 6050
Fargo, ND 58108-6050

Thank you for your support of the NDWPCC and the Student and Young Professionals Reception.

Best Regards,

Kellen Grubb
NDSU AWWA/WEF Student Chapter