

Japanese Gardens Today: Financial Support

Japanese gardens demand high quality care and maintenance. That costs money. Unless you have a dedicated source of revenue, such as a huge endowment or a fabulously wealthy sugar daddy, you are faced with having to generate revenue on an ongoing basis. And if your 'sugar daddy' has been city government or a university, how safe is that funding now? How can a public Japanese garden come up with the financial support it needs to maintain and operate?

Individuals

Let's start with the basics. The vast majority of philanthropy comes from individuals. Corporate support has become more and more difficult to acquire and it is increasingly marketing-driven. In other words, what can you provide the corporation with in return for its money? Foundation grants, for the most part, come from individual connections and still make up only a small percentage of giving. Government support? Most state and local governments have been cutting back, sometimes drastically, on support for nonprofits in general and cultural institutions in particular, as tax revenues have dwindled. In a down economy individuals may also have less to give, but they are still giving. Whether in the form of cash, through family foundations or donor advised funds, or via bequests, individuals are the source of roughly 90% of charitable giving.

The old rule of thumb is that 20% of donors give 80% of gifts and many would argue that it is closer to 10% who give 90% of the money. The challenge is to determine who those 10 or 20% are and what motivates them, then to focus your attention on that relatively small group of people. To keep myself focused, I periodically remind myself that it takes just as much time and effort to get a person who can afford to give \$100 to give that amount as it does another person who can afford to give \$100,000 to do so.

In the area of arts and culture, people give to excellence and meaning, not need. People are moved to give because they recognize, appreciate and want others to experience the quality of the Japanese garden and the meaning it has for them. Donors are passionate about the causes they support.



Who is passionate about your garden?

- **Board members** care enough to take on fiduciary responsibility for the garden. At least some board members should be among the most generous donors and all should give generously according to their means. If the Board isn't giving, why should anyone else?
- **Volunteers** care enough to give their time and expertise which may be extremely valuable. Some will also make significant gifts and, especially, bequests. Pay attention to volunteers and others who ask questions outside their 'normal' area of volunteering. You might be surprised to find your next major donor.
- **Cancer and other disease survivors** often find solace and motivation through their experiences in Japanese gardens. Some become your most passionate advocates and supporters in gratitude.
- **Long-time members** have demonstrated their passion for the garden over a period of years. They may be willing to increase annual gifts if asked and also may be great prospects for bequests and other planned gifts.
- **People who got married in the garden** obviously find it beautiful and meaningful. They and their families will have fond memories every time they look at a photo from the wedding – even a generation or two down the line.
- **People who take classes** or participate in events demonstrate an interest in the subject matter and often make friends with an instructor or other students with whom they share a passion for your garden.
- **Random visitors** of means sometimes are so impressed and moved by their experience in the garden that they become deeply involved or just write a big check. Two of the biggest gifts I was involved in acquiring came about through the initiative of the donors who said that they just loved the garden/museum and wanted to make a gift.

Involvement

People who are involved in one way or another in the life of your garden are more likely to become donors and to increase their giving. Find ways to involve people – as a volunteer, on a committee, in a fundraising event, on the Board. People like access to people who interest them – garden designers or other specialists, visiting lecturers, the garden's director, socially prominent people associated with the garden, etc. Provide access – as a reward, not an enticement, for giving. It may sound mercenary and coldly calculating, but providing for the financial wellbeing of a Japanese garden is, in fact, an essential part of the business of running a Japanese garden.

In seeking financial support for your Japanese garden, you are providing people with opportunities to give, or give back, to something that holds real meaning in their lives.