

# Parks & Recreation

The monthly magazine of the National Recreation and Park Association

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Private Routes to Public Good



Boston Common: a recent beneficiary of corporate dollars  
Photo courtesy Kelsey Ohman

So, you've sorted your views on working with private corporations for helping in the funding operations of your park and you're ready to shop for partners. Even if the benefits of the new revenue didn't outweigh perceptions of loss of control and the "privatization of parks," the reality of the worst economic conditions since World War II all but makes it mandatory. But how to pursue?

In a [profile in the March 2011 issue of PARKS & RECREATION](#), Dan Biederman lays to rest the myths he sees thwarting the private partnership approach. After all, Biederman explains, "Why not let the private sector pay?"

"Corporations want to introduce products," says Biederman, who led the restoration of Bryant Park in New York City and is currently working with the City of Boston to refurbish Boston Common. He's become a master at monitoring the pulse of corporate giving for public spaces. "If you are lucky enough to have an attractive space for them to do that, then you can get their sponsorship dollars."

There hasn't been a better time in the past five years for park agencies to pursue corporate sponsorships, he says. "It took a couple of years after the recession hit for things to pick up again," he says, but the funds are now flowing toward "place-based marketing opportunities." In other words, Biederman explains, companies are looking to channel marketing dollars toward "identifying a product with a much loved space."

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In addition to a number of suggestions in the [March issue of PARKS & RECREATION](#), Biederman has concrete advice for administrators and advocates alike for pursuing private dollars.

1. **Resolve whatever ambivalence you may have about seeking corporate dollars.** Remember that businesses that partner with parks usually aim to blend corporate branding and promotion with philanthropy. Corporations are willing to negotiate, and park directors who enter into dialogue knowing what they want can reach mutually beneficial sponsorship agreements.
2. **Start approaching locally based corporations.** If you need direction or coaching in this effort, try reaching out to another agency that's already had some success in landing corporate sponsors.
3. **Try approaching corporations that may not be locally based—but that are promoting new products or services in your area.** Biederman suggests reading the *Wall Street Journal's* daily reports on new products being introduced.
4. **Remember that banks, in particular, are almost always eager for opportunities to gain new accounts by setting up tables and displays in public places.**
5. **Reach out to the event producers in your area.** Most cities have at least a few well established event producers—professionals who have been retained by corporations to coordinate gatherings, product introductions and testing, and other kinds of promotions. "They are useful people to get to know."

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