

Project Planning, Budgeting, ATC, the NPS, and You – Frequently Asked Questions

Q: When I ask ATC for help on funding trail projects for the coming year, they're usually able to help out, what's changed?

A: *In the past, ATC received general program funding from the NPS that could be used at ATC's discretion to assist clubs in any trail-related projects. Now, NPS funds are requested for specific projects, not general programs. For example, funds used to be requested based on an average number of crew weeks run each year. Now, rather than crew weeks, funding is based on individual projects such as "relocate 1-mile of trail on Firescald Ridge". Because the NPS is subject to the federal budget process, projects must be identified at least 2-years ahead of time.*

Q: Doesn't the money my club receives for projects come from ATC?

A: *It may appear that the funding your club receives comes from ATC, but in many cases, particularly for projects related to the trail and trail facilities, the dollars actually originate with the NPS. The NPS, through our cooperative agreement, transfers funds to ATC, who then either pays for projects directly or further distributes the funds to clubs or other partners. ATC and ATPO staffs work together closely to prioritize projects trailwide. ATC "optimizes" NPS contributions by providing matching funds or (through clubs and trail crews) volunteer labor, privately raised funding (such as the LL Bean Grants-to-Club program), and closing federal funding gaps when they occasionally arise.*

Q: My club doesn't get any money from ATC, do we still have to worry about all this budget and project planning stuff?

A: *If you ever need the assistance of a trail crew, need to construct a new parking lot, replace a shelter roof, or upgrade your privy, and may need some funding help, then you'll need to work with ATC and NPS to plan and seek that funding. There's no club that can't benefit from additional funding –you just have to plan for it!*

Q: Okay, my club could use some funding help for a few projects, but what does the NPS pay for anyway?

A: *In 2005, the NPS provided ATC with nearly \$1.2 M of specific trail project funding. Those funds went directly to trail projects that were completed by Konnarock, Rocky Top, Mid-Atlantic Trail crew, MATC trail crew, SCA crews, including Cascade Brook bridge replacement in New Hampshire, Bear Mountain relocation planning in New York, structure demolitions in 4 states, re-painting of boundary, and mowing of open areas. Almost every section of trail benefited from these funds!*

Q: Great, what do I have to do to get my project considered for NPS funds?

A: *You'll need to review and update your club's Five-Year Plan as necessary. These Plans were originally compiled in 2003 by each club and then were significantly updated in 2004. Now, those plans need to be revised to reflect the current needs and any newly identified projects all the way out through 2012.*

Q: How do I update the Five-Year Plan?

A: *You'll need to do three things:*

- 1. Review the project list and indicate if any of the projects have already been completed.*
- 2. Make any changes to the existing projects such as the year, the scope of the project, the number of crew weeks, and/or the club priority.*
 - 2006 projects are locked. Any changes need to be brought to the attention of the Regional Director immediately!*
 - 2007 projects have already been requested. The overall dollar amount of the 2007 budget request is fixed. Projects can be moved or added if necessary, but no additional funding is available.*
 - 2008 through 2011 projects are more flexible. Additions and changes can be accommodated, however changes should be kept to the minimum feasible.*
 - 2012 is completely open and new projects should be added to the list.*
- 3. Remove projects that, for whatever reason, no longer are needed or no longer require NPS funding assistance.*

Q: Why do I have to plan projects in 2012, I barely know what projects will happen next year?

A: *Funding is requested in conjunction with the federal budget cycle so that project funding we request in 2006 is*

for projects scheduled in 2008. The intent of planning for five years out is to allow the NPS to predict funding needs in anticipation for its future budget requests. So, in 2006, the NPS is looking for projects for 2008 through 2012. Funding for projects for 2006 was requested in 2004, and funding for projects in 2007 was requested earlier this year.

Q: My club is really bad at planning, what if we have to switch a project at the last minute?

A: *Switching projects may be acceptable in some cases. The NPS will not be able to provide any more funding than what was originally planned. Switching projects must be on a one-to-one basis for the same amount of money and within the same funding source. Keep in mind that there is a significant ripple affect when projects are changed. You should contact your regional office prior to making any last minute changes.*

Q: What happens when the next big hurricane or winter ice storm strikes and a shelter is crushed and needs to be rebuilt but wasn't included in the Five-Year Plan because it was an unexpected event?

A: *As they say, "stuff" happens. Projects can be added as emergency funding requests. There's no guarantee that the emergency project will be funded, but it is possible. Alternatively, projects can be shifted to accommodate unexpected needs, but no additional NPS money will be available. That unexpected shelter project would essentially bump something that was already on the list. Of course, other non-NPS funding sources are often sought by ATC to help in these situations. In fact, this underscores the strength of the multi-lateral NPS: ATC: Club partnership.*

Q: When does my club have to get the updated Five-Year Plan back to ATC?

A: *Updated Five-Year Plans are due back to your ATC Regional Office no latter than January 1st, 2006. ATC and ATPO staff will do everything feasible to make this process as painless as possible!*

Q: That sounds like a lot of work, what if my club decided not to do it?

A: *Your club will not receive any NPS funds and ATC or other trail crews won't be working on your section! Remember, most of the trail project funding that ATC receives is from the NPS. The updating the Five-Year Plans shouldn't be that difficult to do because you won't be starting from scratch. Most clubs already have a fairly comprehensive listing of projects and it will only be a matter of revising what is already there. ATC's regional staff can help you update your Five-Year Plan.*

Q: How do the Trail Assessments that ATC has been doing fit into this?

A: *The Trail Assessments should be used to assist in identifying and compiling projects into the Five-Year Plan. The Trail Assessments can be used in two ways. In some cases large projects are specifically identified during the assessments. These projects can be added to the Five-Year Plan and prioritized as appropriate. In other cases, individual deficiencies are identified. These individual deficiencies can be "lumped" into projects and added to the Five-Year Plan. For example, if the Assessment identified the need for three waterbars, 9 rock steps, 200 feet of turnpike, and a 12-foot bridge, all in the same general geographic area, each of these deficiencies could make up a single ATC Crew project that could be added to the Five-Year Plan.*

Q: When do I get to see the information from the Trail Assessments?

A: *Data collected from the 2004 Trail Assessments has been provided to each club that had sections of trail included that year. 2005 Trail Assessment data is still being processed and will be made available as soon as possible. Unfortunately that will likely be after the deadline of the Five-Year Plan. We are currently working to streamline this process to get the information back to you for your use much quicker.*

Q: How does the Regional Partnership Committee fit into this planning and budgeting process?

A: *The RPCs will play a role in the overall project priority setting and budgeting for ATC at the regional level. This process is still evolving and will be guided by the RPCs.*

Q: Who do I contact if I have more questions?

A: *Your ATC regional office staff will be happy to answer any questions you have and help you in anyway with your club project planning.*

Q: Can you explain how the entire Federal Budget process works?

A: *That's almost impossible – you're better off just going for a hike!*