

# Building

# Community

Bulletin # 14 August 1994

# Foundations

## Grantmaking Consulting Program

Sponsored by the Philanthropic Ventures Foundation

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These Bulletins are part of the on-site Grantmaking Consulting Program. They include material from observations of how community foundations conduct their work. They also include material based on 35 years of experience by the author in the non-profit and foundation fields.

The basic premise of the consulting program is that good grantmaking by community foundations develops the credibility and reputation of those foundations and thereby is one of the best avenues to increasing the assets of the foundations.

The goal of the consulting program is to see if community foundations can improve their grantmaking through a process of allowing a critique of their work by an outsider, with give and take discussions and then making changes in operations as desired.

Good grantmaking is defined as making grants that have a positive impact on the community, that bring satisfaction to the donor, and that relate to major social issues.

We would welcome definitions of good grantmaking that others use.

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## Use of Volunteers

*A way to supplement your staff.*

### Background

A critical concern of all community foundations is having adequate and quality staffing. The smaller the foundation, the more critical is this concern. For smaller foundations, the use of volunteers offers one avenue in supplementing the professional staff.

We are assuming that two full time professional people are the minimum staff for running a community foundation: an executive director who does the development/program work and a person who is receptionist, bookkeeper, and word processor. To be sure, some foundations initially use volunteers in these roles but experience has shown that as soon as possible these two positions should be paid positions which can then be supplemented with the use of volunteers.

Not only is adequate staffing an issue for smaller foundations, but administrative costs are as well. Here again, volunteers can be invaluable in offering services that otherwise would take funds from grantmaking.

## Kinds of Volunteers

There is a wide variety of the kinds of volunteers a foundation can use:

- College students
- Junior League members
- Retired persons
- Persons between jobs
- Persons in training for a job
- Persons in programs requiring a public service internship
- High school students, court referrals, alternative sentencing clients, job corps enrollees  
(All of these latter groups have not been tried by this writer.)

Some foundations refer to volunteers as interns or fellows and some foundations offer stipends to persons filling these positions. (A stipend is money for the job but is not a salary, e.g. it can be used to cover transportation costs.)

## Agreements

There needs to be an agreement on the minimum amount of time involved in volunteering. For example, college students, who are often referred to as interns, are told the minimum time commitment would be one half day a week for six weeks. There are some situations where trainee volunteers are available full time for up to six months (they receive funding from their sponsor organizations).

It is important that there be agreements with volunteers the same as there are with employees. Such an agreement defines when the person starts, what hours they work, a description of the work to be done, and other contingencies such as furnishing bus fare, covering use of one's automobile, etc. It is important that this agreement be warm in tone and not "official."

As mentioned above, volunteers are also referred to as interns and fellows. Some foundations have a clearly stated policy that they do not subsequently hire such persons for staff positions, in hopes of avoiding people volunteering as a way to be hired.

This writer differs with such a policy in that he has found that a good volunteer job done well often turns into a paying job because the person has shown their capability and has verified the need for such services. Nevertheless, nothing should be implied with volunteers regarding the possibility of them being eventually hired.

## Use of Volunteers

At one foundation a gentleman in his 80's handles all the scholarship grantmaking as well as other educational funding. He reads all scholarship applications to verify their completeness, he sits with others as a judge for selections, he handles all correspondence with students and colleges. In addition, this volunteer handles grants up to \$250 to individual public school teachers for educational excursion bus expenses.

Scholarships are very labor intensive for foundations to offer. Volunteers make it possible for even the smallest community foundation to have such programs.

The important point to understand here is the interplay between the volunteers and the professional staff. In the case of scholarships, the application should be designed and approved by the executive director with future modifications suggested by the volunteers. The selection process should be decided upon by the executive director but is implemented by volunteers. Correspondence can be signed by the volunteer when it is requesting further information; scholarship notification and transmittal of checks are signed by the executive director.

The volunteer helps design, makes suggestions, drafts correspondence and conducts the project; the professional staff does the decision making and the secretarial work (unless the volunteer is proficient and willing to do this).

In other words the volunteer is like a staff member but the responsibility for his/her work lies with the professional staff.

College students are very useful to visit grantees and conduct evaluations of grants. This requires training of the volunteers, i.e. how to schedule a visit, be on time, don't linger, what to ask and what to look for, how to be confident and warm and overcome one's nervousness.

Volunteers can do an analysis with recommendations of segments of a foundation's grantmaking, e.g. women's issues, effectiveness of youth funding, new ideas for environmental grants, etc.

Volunteers can undertake special projects such as handle all the details for convening by a foundation, conduct a special public relations event, handle press releases and media contacts.

Volunteers, well trained, can undertake some of the program work of the foundation by evaluating grant requests, visiting applicants, and writing up findings.

### Conclusion

Volunteers of all ages, backgrounds, and talents can be of immense help to community foundations of all sizes, especially smaller foundations.

If a foundation executive decides to use volunteers, it is important to pay attention to their care and nurturing. The volunteer's morale will decide whether or not that person continues on the job and does good work.

Recognition can be given informally or formally, from a simple 'thank you' to a reception honoring volunteers. Presents and plaques are not necessary but being aware of a volunteer's work and acknowledging it is.

One last observation. It has been the experience of the writer that volunteers often become very enthusiastic about their work and about the community foundation. It became the practice at one community foundation of some volunteers to personally give \$10,000 each to the foundation annually.

## Comments On Grantmaking Consulting

"I can't thank you enough for the tireless enthusiasm and endless knowledge that you brought to our on-site consultation....I think it was a perfect time in the foundation's life to have someone come in and shake us up a little. Your presentations and individual meetings with members and committees seems to have accomplished just that."

"He was very well received with all groups. The Board was particularly impressed with his suggestions to improve grantmaking as a development tool."

"We expected him to offer much more criticism. Maybe he did, but we took it as welcome suggestions."

Gail Seidensticker  
Executive Director  
Gulf Coast Community Foundation

This newsletter is published monthly as a service to community foundations. Past topics include: *The Application Procedure; Getting Out into the Community-What's Worth Funding?; Risk Taking and Grantmaking-Do They Go Together?; Foundation Board/Staff Relations; Accountability and Efficiency; Services to Non-Profits; The Site Visit; Foundation Records Retention; How to Benefit from Technical Assistance-Using Consultants Effectively; Scholarships: The Most Labor Intensive Grantmaking; What is Worth Funding: Initiated Projects; and The Foundation as Convener.*

Back issues are available by calling 510-645-1890.

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