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DIALOGUE

Number 7

A Periodic Newsletter for Development Officers

— Bill Somerville, Editor —

Dialogue is an effort to have give and take between funders and development officers. Dialogue was the idea of a development officer. Dialogue is open to your participation and you may send questions or ideas at anytime.

The Editor asked Darla Atwood, a seasoned development officer, if she would give her thoughts on what it is like working with persons who give grants. The following is her presentation.

“Reflections From The Other Side”

In August, I assisted Bill Somerville with a workshop for community foundation program officers. My talk focused on “Games Funders Play.” Surprisingly, it was well received and opened considerable dialogue that had all of us empathetic of our respective roles.

The games I discussed with the group of program officers included:

- ◆ overuse of forms or reports. Some grant applications are so complicated that the nonprofit feels it should receive a reimbursement grant to pay for the time spent in writing it;
- ◆ interference into the daily operations of the nonprofit. (One foundation allegedly said if they could select the project manager for a proposed program, it would be funded);
- ◆ forced collaborations and unnatural alliances (There are times that collaborations take more effort than they're worth);
- ◆ pushing board and staff diversity when the foundation shows little diversity itself;
- ◆ requiring a nonprofit to disclose the sexual preference of its Board of Directors;
- ◆ playing policy makers or telling the service providers how to do their jobs;
- ◆ not acknowledging proposals or reports sent to the foundation. (Therefore leaving the nonprofit to wonder if the information was ever received and found acceptable);

To get funding for a proposed project, nonprofits sometimes are required to jump through several foundation hoops many of which are not necessary;

- ◆ being so busy that you don't have time to return phone calls, review proposals, or put the nonprofit's request on the docket.
- ◆ promising to put the nonprofit on the docket, but failing to do so--or worse failing to tell the nonprofit it was excluded from this quarter's consideration.

- ◆ promising to fund, then giving the nonprofit the run-around for six to twelve months only to turn down the request;
- ◆ being inaccessible to the development officer in such a way that conversations are conveyed through an assistant who has to ask the program officer who then asks the assistant.....tag you're it!

These are actual experiences my colleagues or I have had. The program officers who were part of the training were surprised to learn of these games (they never thought of them as such), but promised to take a look at their own operations to see how they could be more sensitive to the needs of development officers.

My eyes were opened as well. I learned that program officers do not have as much power as I thought. They have considerable obstacles to overcome especially as it relates to their trustees or executive directors. For example, program officers are more willing to take risks vis a vis funding programs than are their Boards or executive directors, but are seldom given the opportunity to do so. This results in safe funding, but no "venture philanthropy." Soft programs, such as those to enhance self esteem, are almost impossible to sell because results are difficult to measure.

The program officers shared their pet peeves with me relative to working with development officers and grantwriters:

- ◆ don't make promises about the potential results of the project that can't be kept;
- ◆ localize the issue (problem, challenge), don't give global statistics, but local ones. Global issues cannot be solved at the local level, but what can the nonprofit do at the local level to make a difference?
- ◆ if problems or obstacles arise while implementing the program be honest and tell the program officer. What were the obstacles? How were they addressed? Were you able to overcome them? This helps the program officer when getting requests for similar programs. They then can alert other nonprofits about potential problems before they start. Thereby saving time, dollars and frustration.
- ◆ specifically define how the program's effectiveness will be measured.
- ◆ foundation boards are seldom willing to commit to multi-year funding so better not to ask. First prove the efficacy of the program, then ask for another year of funding.

I learned how to view proposals from the other side of the grantmaking process. This may have been the most useful aspect of the training session as it is a rare opportunity for program officers, let alone, development officers to take the time to objectively critique requests. Bill taught us to ask while reviewing requests: how "do-able" or realistic is the program; will the program address the issue and does it make sense; is it possible given the budget or the agency/staff expertise; and will the proposed program have the anticipated results.

We all agreed that the session created an unusually open dialogue between foundation and non profit staff which would enable us to do our jobs better and make a difference in the lives of the people we serve.

Darla Atwood - Director of Development
Edgewood Children's Center - San Francisco CA

Questions From Our Readers

Q: It is really getting harder for most non-profits to obtain operating money. The United Way, government, and corporate funding are all diminishing their operating support to non-profits and foundations have never provided money for ongoing operating expenses. What is your take on this situation?

A: Foundations have seen themselves as first funders with it in mind that the United Way or the government would continue support. Things have changed but historically, maybe not as much as we think. For example, government funding has always been cyclical, it comes and goes as the political climate changes. With the United Way starting to give grants rather than annual allocations, the public has to decide whether or not this is what they want because this is a major change in focus.

***Editor's Note:** The Editor has developed a paper called "The Seven Sources of Funds for Non-Profits." It is his opinion that there are only seven sources and it is the skill of the development officer in calling on these sources that determines the financial security of a non-profit. For a copy, call (510) 645-1890 and leave your fax number.*

Q: Will you comment on the criteria you and others use to determine a truly replicable program, and what enables you to see through false claims.

A: "Any good program can be replicated." True, but it takes a good person to do it. The Editor tends to stay away from the term replicate because it doesn't mean anything unless the human talent is present. Sharing information seems to be more important. The give and take amongst creative people is all important.

Q: What is the best way to list pending grants for a project budget?

A: The Editor asks applicants to list other funding sources that are being approached. One can make up a list with amounts requested to show how a budget would be funded. This can reflect in the income part of the budget or the budget can merely have an item "Foundation grants" with the list giving details.

It is always good when a funder gives you a grant to notify the other pending funders. This could raise enthusiasm with them.

Q: I am interested in working in corporate programs. I have identified two local corporations that are doing quite well and have given support to non-profits but neither have a formally structured giving program. I want to propose this idea to them and position myself as a candidate for either of their programs. Any advice?

A: Write to the top person in the corporation, state what you can do for them. No puff, just a clean selling job on your background and some examples of ideas you have. Your resume and letters of reference by business people would be good. The Editor suggests including a picture. It can't be required, it is your option and it guarantees who will be remembered if many people apply. Try a draft of your letter on the Editor.

Q: What are some suggestions for sparking renewed interest in a two-year old capital campagin?

A: Your publicity should reflect that the on-going campagin has done well so far, that you are this close to your goal. Be upbeat, people respond to a success. Next, go to some of the original givers and feel out if they would consider one last push to finish the campagin.

Comments From Our Readers

"Your volunteered time and expertise, working with me to improve a grant proposal, was really valuable. The questions you raise and the answers we developed made the proposal tighter and more focused. Thank you for caring about the quality of the dialogue between grantseekers and grantmakers."

Alan Lee Follett -Fund Development Project Coordinator - San Francisco CA

"Thanks for Dialogue, thanks for your insight, thanks for sharing."

Kimberly Howard - Organizing Project - San Francisco CA

"As both a seeker - and - maker of grants I am always interested in the questions of other grantseekers and the answers of the grantmakers. Your newsletter is informative to all parties, and I read it regularly."

Glenda J. O'Neal - Grants Unlimited - Danville CA

Fax your questions for Dialogue to (510) 645-1892:

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