

# DIALOGUE

*A Periodic Newsletter for Development Officers*

- Bill Somerville, Editor -

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*Dialogue* is published to help improve relations between funders and development officers. *Dialogue* was started at the request of a development officer. Readers are invited to submit questions. *Dialogue* can be received by US post or e-mail.

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**Q: How can my nonprofit get a competitive edge?**

**A:** Create a 'Performance Portfolio' for your agency with such items as:

- Board attendance, support, and involvement
- Vision statement for your future
- Examples of willingness to venture
- Pictures

Other items might include such statements as:

- We are dynamic and these are new programs we have added
- We developed a whole new way of upgrading our staff
- We have very little staff turnover
- Almost every member of our Board is involved in our program

Use this portfolio: send with a proposal  
 send with your report to a funder  
 use it to introduce yourself

**Q: Do funders have concerns in common?**

**A:** Yes, a universal concern is that funders want 'significance/impact' with their grants, and grantees who help define this have the competitive edge.

**Q: What would help me to have access to rich people?**

**A:** Get publicity for your program in the media. Over and over, the Editor has donors come to him, pointing to articles in newspapers about a nonprofit project that interests them.

**Q: How can newer nonprofits compete for funding?**

**A:** Speak to the quality factors of the people starting the nonprofit. Outstanding things in their backgrounds. Speak to the reasons why the program was started and what it took to get it started.

**Q: What is the most important thing you need me to be in order to fund my organization?**

**A:** There isn't one thing. Be honest, candid, sincere, and try to create a relationship where you are more than just an applicant. Relationships are the basis for trust and trust is a wonderful lubricant to make things happen. Lastly, don't forget a sense of humor.

**Q: How does one create a relationship?**

**A:** Invite the funder over anytime; tell them when you are the busiest so they can come then and see you at work. Don't invite them for an open house. Call funders socially, "How are you doing? We are doing great." Send funders pictures and notes about your work or an interesting news item.

**Q: Assume you have several proposals of equal merit that meet your funding criteria. What would be the deciding factor(s) to move one proposal forward in the funding cycle and not the others?**

**A:** Is there a relationship with one of the applicants? If so, that applicant has the competitive edge. All grantmaking, in the final analysis, is subjective - do I like it or not?

**Q: You talk of 'factors of excellence' in the operations of nonprofits. What do you mean?**

**A:** It isn't so important what the Editor thinks of such factors as it is what the people who run programs think. It is very important that people define factors of excellence in their work and that they share this information.

**Q: What do you think of mail solicitations asking for contributions?**

**A:** It is a mistake to send mail solicitations to foundations and professional grantmakers. The Editor receives hundreds of these and they represent a wasted effort.

**Q: How do I get a foot in the door if funders are not accepting unsolicited proposals?**

**A:** Research what the funder is interested in, and if your program has had some success in

that area, share your knowledge with the funder and start a relationship.

**Q: How can we get consistent ongoing support for the consistently excellent annual service we provide?**

**A:** This is called continuing funding. The Editor knows of no foundation that gives continuing funding although he does work with some donors who give year after year support, and they do this because of their enthusiasm for a particular cause. It gets back to relationship again. Good work, good reports, good people involved. Keep the funder apprised.

**Q: What are strategies/ideas to secure multi-year, ongoing funding?**

**A:** When you apply for a grant, indicate the need for multi-year funding and ask, “On the basis of outstanding results of our work, would the funder consider year-to-year funding?” Many funders don’t like to commit for multi-year grants but they will consider one year at a time.

**Q: What will make a letter of intent stand out as you review them?**

**A:** Clear, concise, and complete. An LOI need only be three paragraphs. Who are you, what are you proposing to do, and what do you need money for? The Editor has received many letters of intent that were so well written that he funded the project without any further paper.

**Q: What are the steps to take to develop long-term relationships?**

**A:** Keep the funder informed about your work and your progress. Stay in touch more than once a year. Invite the funder to visit anytime. Stay after the funder to come by. The Editor had a grantee who swam daily in the San Francisco Bay and who invited the Editor to join him. After constant cajoling, the Editor went swimming.

The Editor wants to thank Dynell A. Garron, author of *The Funder’s Checklist: An Inside Look at How Funders Evaluate Proposals and Nonprofit Organizations* for a number of the questions in this issue of Dialogue.

Ms. Garron can be reached at [www.funderschecklist.com](http://www.funderschecklist.com)

***Dialogue***

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