

# 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 of non-profit organizations. *Dialogue* was started at the request of a development officer. Readers are invited to submit questions for response. *Dialogue* can be received by U.S. mail or e-mail.

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*Dialogue* is published by **Philanthropic Ventures Foundation**

**Q: Beyond the economic state of affairs, what critical issues do you see impacting the field, or the sector as a whole?**

**A:** The willingness of agencies to venture, take risks, try new approaches, suffer some failures. Business as usual sometimes isn't enough. The non-profit sector pretty much takes public opinion for granted. The donor public needs to identify and understand the quality factors in human service work so that their giving can be thoughtful rather than emotional.

**Q: What are the characteristics of an effective non-profit organization? What qualities do grantmakers look for?**

**A:** Foundation personnel work hard to be objective in their grantmaking, but in the final analysis it is a subjective decision - do they like it or not? The following are some objective criteria that are useful in grantmaking decisions:

- Is the executive director of the program an outstanding person?
- How long has he/she been in the position?
- How long is he/she planning to stay in the position?
- How is the staff's morale? What is the data on staff turnover?
- Is the heir apparent to the executive on the staff?
- Is the program known for innovative thinking?
- Is the program known for venturing and trying new approaches?
- How is attendance at Board meetings?
- How much time is spent by staff serving the Board and its committees?
- What do people served by the program have to say?
- What do professionals have to say about the program?
- Does the program have a vision for the future?
- How has the program dealt with its failures?

**Adding to this list of what makes for a good grant, Colburn Wilbur, the past president of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, with 30 years experience in working with applicants, suggests the following:**

- Design individual grants as part of a long term strategy to improve the community and people's lives.
- Listen to those whom the grant is planned to assist (not just the intermediary non-profit).
- Help the organization and people you support to be stronger after the grant money has been spent.

**Q: How does one structure a request for operating expense support?**

**A:** This is a request for general support, sometimes the hardest type of funding to get. You have got to present something significant and special about your program to get such funding, because everyone wants the same thing. For example, you research the funder and find what their interests are, and you state that as part of your relationship to the funder you are willing and eager to share results of your work with the funder; maybe even you are willing to try some new approaches to your work. Give a full, rich description of your work, with pictures. Invite a site visit. Try to get an interview. Don't overload your request.

**Fine tuning to make yourself more effective:**

- Don't send "Dear Friend" solicitation letters to professional grantmakers – this is a worthless effort.
- Professionals give grants; people give gifts. Don't say "Thank you for your grant." It should be "Thank you for the grant." It is not his/her money.
- Don't ask for money by e-mail.
- Send the funder pictures of your work.
- Use discretion in sending videos on your program; typically no one watches these.
- Invite site visits and make them interesting. For example, introduce a staff member and let that staff member lead part of the tour privately. Introduce a client of your program.

**Q: "Life after the grant." What do you think good stewardship looks like?**

**A:** Keep the funder apprised of your progress: telephone calls; narrative reports; pictures; invite site visits. Even share what went wrong when that happens. This is being candid. Try to get together with the funder personally. None of this e-mail stuff.

**Note:** All e-mail sign-offs should contain full contact information: your full name and title, your agency name, mail and e-mail addresses, telephone, facsimile and website. The Editor receives innumerable e-mails signed “Phyllis” or “George,” and that is all.

**Q: About the correspondence sent to an applicant denying their request, do you get specific on why they were denied, or keep it simple that they were just denied?**

**A:** The Editor keeps it simple. This is the most honest response, but it comes across to some as abrupt. No matter how much explanation is given, people still feel let down. Applicants can call and ask if they can apply at another time.

**Q: How does one handle past decline relationship building?**

**A:** Stay in touch by providing information about your progress. Some people send their newsletter. If something special is happening, invite a site visit. Don't press yourself on the funder. Send information or a special anecdote that might interest the funder. Try to make yourself special.

**Q: What do you look for that makes up an outstanding professional?**

<b>A:</b>	Past accomplishments	Energy level
	Years on the job	Passion
	Vision for the future	Enthusiasm
	Creative thinking	Sense of humor
	Taking the initiative	Ethical
	No fear of failure	Personable
	Dedicated	Thoughtfulness
	Insightful	Ambitious
	Articulate	Fair
	<b>Not desired:</b>	
	Pushy	Quantity equals success
	Egotistical	Impolite
	Defensive	Aggressive

## EVALUATION TERMS

You are familiar with the philanthropic terms **ROI** (Return on Investment) and **SROI** (Social Return on Investment). Elliot Hoffman, a philanthropic businessman in the San Francisco Bay Area suggests a new perspective with these new terms:

**ROH** (Return on Humanity)

**ROC** (Return on Community)

## *Dialogue*

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### ABOUT THE EDITOR



**Bill Somerville** has been in non-profit and philanthropic work for 44 years. He was the director of a community foundation for 17 years, and in 1991 founded Philanthropic Ventures Foundation where he serves as President and Executive Director. PVF is a demonstration foundation practicing unique forms of grantmaking and conducting initiative philanthropy. He has consulted at over 265 community foundations in the United States, Canada, and abroad, on creative grantmaking and foundation operations. In addition to *Dialogue*, he publishes *Building Community Foundations*, which is distributed to all community foundations. His primary interest is in the creative and significant use of the philanthropic dollar.