



Grassroots Philanthropy: Field Notes of a Maverick Grantmaker

By Bill Somerville with Fred Setterberg; 144 pages; published by [Heyday Books](#)

If you are tired of the typical grantmaking process that most foundations have employed for years, pick up a copy of Bill Somerville's *Grassroots Philanthropy*. His opinions and perspectives about philanthropy and the act of grantmaking are so refreshing that you'll find yourself wondering why more foundations don't operate like the Philanthropic Ventures Foundation (PVF), which Somerville founded in 1991. While the book acknowledges the huge potential for modern philanthropy, the author doesn't shy away from discussing philanthropy's shortcomings as well.

With more than three decades of grantmaking experience under his belt, Somerville knows a thing or two about foundations. He attributes their often-lacklustre performance to five flaws: a paper-laden bureaucracy; being slow, stubborn, and unresponsive; being averse to risk; being problem-centred; and being too passive. If any of these traits sound familiar, don't despair. He also offers five points for reform: locate outstanding people doing important work; move quickly (and shred paper); embrace risk; focus on ideas instead of problems; and take initiative. The second half of the book illustrates these principles through concrete examples and anecdotes, many taken from Somerville's own experiences working with PVF. Over and over, he demonstrates how small grants, distributed quickly to deserving people within the community, can have a huge and long-lasting impact.

As a storyteller, Somerville's words will grab you from the first page, but it is his expert advice that will keep you turning those pages (perhaps to learn more about the qualities of outstanding nonprofit professionals, or the seven steps toward paperless giving). And it's not just foundation leaders and corporate funders who will benefit. Anyone reading this book will gain valuable knowledge about the principles and power of grassroots philanthropy.

<http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/books/bkrev159.html>