

PHILANTHROPIC VENTURES  
FOUNDATION SPECIALIZES IN  
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a newsletter for our donors and colleagues

# progress



## ABOUT THE EDITOR

Moira Walsh is Associate Director of Philanthropic Ventures Foundation, responsible for donor development, program work, and managing foundation operations. Moira has a strong business background, coupled with extensive experience in the non-profit arena. Prior to joining PVF, Moira was a partner at Carr, McClellan, Ingersoll, Thompson & Horn, where she practiced law for 12 years. Moira has led and served on the boards of several non-profit organizations and is a native San Franciscan.

## Why Outstanding People are the Key to Good Philanthropy

The following is an excerpt from the new book by PVF President, Bill Somerville - **Grassroots Philanthropy: Field Notes of a Maverick Grantmaker.**

Nothing is more important to the success of a voluntary program than its people. You can choke off the cash flow to a trickle, stick the office in some decrepit hole in the wall, lay siege to daily operations with every imaginable distraction and obstruction – but if the program is led by outstanding people, the effort can still succeed brilliantly.

That's why I look to excellence in leadership as the first requirement for any program that I am seriously considering funding.

Perhaps this seems like an obvious choice. In truth, most foundations place too much stock in the organizational apparatus encasing people: the five-year plans, annual reports, and most lamentably, grant applications. In effect, these materials erect a paper wall around the individuals charged with getting the work done. They obscure the personal element that lies at the heart of all social progress, and foster the illusion that organizations somehow run of their own accord, without the benefit of human inspiration and guidance. But plans are merely words committed to paper. Even after reading the savviest, best-constructed grant proposal, I still want to know:

- Who is going to make this plan work?
- Are the people in charge tough, resilient, courageous?
- Do they possess the necessary skills?
- Have they succeeded in the past?
- Do they have clear ambitions for the future?
- Are they capable of recognizing their mistakes and changing course?
- How do they deal with failure?
- Are they utterly convinced of their work's importance?
- How long have they been on the job?

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- How long are they committed to staying?
- Is there an heir apparent to the top leadership on staff?
- How is staff morale? Is there any data on turnover?
- How often does the board meet? How many members attend regularly?
- Does the board trust the executive to lead the organization?
- What do the people served by the organization say about its leaders?
- What do other professionals in the field think about the staff?

In short, I focus on the human side of nonprofit enterprise, searching for commitment, skill, vision, and integrity. Plus one other essential: passion.

Nonprofit leaders require huge reserves of vigor and stamina to fuel their efforts. Anything less will end in wilted programs and a dead shell of an organization. But there's another reason why I seek outstanding people as collaborators: They inspire me. I find my enthusiasm renewed every time I meet an individual determined to make the world a better place.

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To purchase **Grassroots Philanthropy: Field Notes of a Maverick Grantmaker** visit [www.heydaybooks.com](http://www.heydaybooks.com); visit our publications page at [www.venturesfoundation.org](http://www.venturesfoundation.org) to read book reviews. If you desire more information feel free to contact us at 510/645-1890 or [info@venturesfoundation.org](mailto:info@venturesfoundation.org).