

Philanthropic Ventures Foundation - *specializing in customized giving for donors*

Maximizing Philanthropy

At PVF, we believe there is always room for improvement, that we should have high expectations of philanthropy, and that we should always strive to do more. Each member of the PVF Staff has many years of experience in non-profit and foundation work, PVF President Bill Somerville leading the helm with 46 years of experience. We recognize that we continue to be students of philanthropy, keenly aware that at each turn there is more to know.

In this vein, we have articulated five areas in which philanthropy can improve. It is in these areas that we try new approaches and provide a unique perspective. We share this with you to better describe our work and to open up a dialogue should you have questions or desire more information.

1. Taking the Initiative – In large part, philanthropy is passive, waiting for the mail - for applications and requests for funding. There is nothing that prevents philanthropy from taking the initiative and causing things to happen – at PVF we refer to this as causative philanthropy, seeing a need and acting upon it.

2. Building Relationships Based on Trust - Philanthropy can be bureaucratic, more about processing paper than getting to know the people doing the work. Forms and applications are filled out and reviewed, as a means for gathering information and ultimately reaching an understanding. The paper trail becomes the relationship. Foundation staff is buried in paper, leaving little time to see non-profit projects in action and the people who are getting the work done.

At PVF, we are out in the community, exposing ourselves to new people and new ideas and seeking out people doing outstanding service work. It is these outstanding people who accomplish so much and we at PVF believe we need to make more of an effort to find them. When we come upon an outstanding person, we get to know their work and invite them to apply for a grant. Our motto at PVF: “Find people you can trust and fund them.”

3. Taking Risks - Naturally, we want our philanthropic grants to make an impact, the bigger the better. The trend, however, is that there are so many hurdles to clear before a grant is made that new ideas and creativity are lost. Philanthropy can be conservative, certainly risk-averse. In order for there to be change, we need to take risks. Risk means that in your professional judgment, something is worth a try even if you are not sure it will work. If you take risks, you will have some failures. If you have no failures, you have not taken any risks. The failures can be a valuable learning experience. The risks that turn into success can improve lives and communities.

4. Responding to Grant Requests Promptly – It is not uncommon for a non-profit organization to wait several months before receiving a response to their grant request. Generally, foundations have a set schedule as to when granting decisions will be made, maybe 2 or 4 times a year.

The needs of non-profit organizations rarely follow the same schedule. The timing in which a grant is made is directly connected to its impact. This is particularly true of small grants. Good timing in making grants is getting the money where it is needed when it is needed. At PVF we pride ourselves at the speed in which we make grants. Our standard turnaround time is 48 hours.

5. Funding Ideas, Not Just Problems – Philanthropy is problem-oriented. The philanthropic arena is good at tackling problems but tends not to act until something is defined as a problem. Many times the organizations that are the most skilled at defining the problem, are the most successful at fundraising.

A different approach, and the tact PVF often takes, is listening to ideas, solutions – finding out what a non-profit wants to have happen and how they propose to bring it about. The concept is to fund ideas rather than fund problems.

Moira Walsh is the Associate Director of PVF, 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.

