

DIALOGUE

A PERIODIC NEWSLETTER FOR DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS

Number 3

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Bill Somerville, Editor

In this, the third issue of Dialogue, we have turned the tables. The funder is asking questions of the development person. Again, we have called on Henry A. Rosso, CFRE and his 47 years experience in fund raising.

The questions are from Bill Somerville, Editor of Dialogue and President of the Philanthropic Ventures Foundation. Mr. Somerville has 22 years experience as a funder and 14 years prior experience in seeking funds.

Q Do you usually ask for more money hoping you might get an amount closer to what you need?

A No. I would feel uncomfortable about using this strategy. The person seeking the grant must be in a position to justify every element comprising the grant request. A "ballooned" grant request would be difficult to justify to the funding source. This principle would pertain whether I would be soliciting an individual or a funding source.

Editor's Note: *Many is the time when the Foundation says its grant range is \$5,000 to \$20,000 and the applicant asks for \$25,000 hoping for the maximum.*

Q When I come over for a site visit do you want to field my questions or do you prefer that the executive director do it?

A My preference would be to involve both the development officer and the executive. Both would be in the position to add to the information exchange. Additionally, it would be useful for each of these two individuals, as a team, to learn more about the foundation's requirements, specific interests and so forth. Additionally, the foundation officer should enjoy interacting with and getting to know two key persons in the NPO.

Editor's Note: *Unfortunately I have seen cases where the development officer postures in front of his/her boss.*

Q What kind of research do you do before approaching my foundation? Do you try to find information on me personally?

A Very definitely, it is important to get to know about you as key person in the foundation, perhaps as much as you will want to know about me as the development officer. This is not a search for idle information. It is a responsible examination to match the thinking, the philosophy, the ethical structure of each person. This may be the beginning of a continuing relationship that will be built on mutual trust.

Q What was the best rejection you ever received from a foundation? What was positive about it?

A The memory is still sharp. It was my first grant request. I did everything wrong. I sent my grant request to the chair of the board. The executive immediately informed me that the approach was wrong. Additionally, he sternly reminded me that the agency in question had recently received a grant from the foundation, and had never acknowledged the grant. And my arithmetic was out of order. What did I gain from all that? That happened in 1963. I have never forgotten it. My tutor was John May of the San Francisco Foundation.

Editor's Note: *A rejection should never diminish the applicant, it should be respectful. When applicants ask "why" I am as candid and frank as they allow me to be, i.e. if they are defensive, I am terse; if they are open, I am too.*

Q Some development officers come on so friendly it is hard to create a straight forward relationship. What do you suggest I do?

A Set the stage for the interview with a friendly but pointed statement that, in reality, this is a business transaction that should be at the head of the agenda. Coffee and socializing could properly earn some pleasant and reasonable time after the business has been concluded. Could it be that they are trying to substitute personality for the tough fact of making a valid case?

Editor's Note: *There is a difference between being cordial and coming on heavy. Some foundation executives adopt an aloof bearing to handle this problem in which case aloofness vs. bumptiousness and communication suffers.*

Q At times development officers seem to not want me to relate to the agency executive director. How do you handle this without affronting the development officer?

A The development officer is making a mistake cutting him or herself off from the interview. The executive and the development officer must operate as a team in the business of fund raising. If the development officer should constantly defer to the chief executive, it would be kindness to take this person aside to explain that the D.O. is viewed and accepted as a professional person, one skilled to provide the foundation officer with the critical case and accurate financial information and to provide this strategic information quickly and in readable form.

It is possible that the chief executive has a dominating personality and a controlling tendency. The D.O. is in a difficult position, should this be. It would be kind to encourage the D.O. to assert her/himself because these professional persons should be in a position to provide the funder with necessary data quickly.

Editor's Note: *My experience has been that the development officer can't field my questions as well as the executive director can and I feel frustrated when I only have access to the development officer.*

Q Some development officers send me a "draft" of their request asking for my comments - which they then incorporate and send the whole thing back to me. How can I stop this practice?

A A neat trick to enlist your support before making an appointment to see you. It is appropriate to explain that there are time constraints that make it difficult to read and comment on preliminary drafts. A short letter of inquiry may be appropriate but submission of an entire grant application in draft form cannot be accepted because of time limitations. This might become a popular strategy that will consume your free time.

Editor's Note: *Over and over I try to teach people that there are no tricks to use; this isn't a game. Henry Rosso's message is one of sincerity and professionalism.*

Q Over and over development officers ask if they can come in to see me to discuss the proposal. I tell them I need something in writing first. What do you think of this response?

A Your response is an appropriate one. Reviewing the proposal prior to a study of the text would seem to put you in a spot. Putting words on paper will compel them to think the process through, to check their facts, to check the arithmetic in the budget, and to insure that the cost estimates are valid and based on hard facts. By all means, "something in writing first."

Q There are many occasions when agency personnel have asked me for money to hire development officers because they are almost broke. I tend to think this is a weak request because of the timing. Am I wrong?

A This is definitely a "loser." It could mean to me that the agency is not in a position to properly utilize the talents and energy of a qualified fund raising professional. What I read here is:

- No experience in fund raising.
- Executive not supportive, knows little about fund raising.
- Board members apathetic, no support for development officer.

I suggest sending them to The Fund Raising School to learn how to invest money in any fund raising program. Otherwise, grant will be a waste.

✂-- Clip Here-----

If you have a question for Dialogue, let us hear from you.

Question:

Send or fax to: Philanthropic Ventures Foundation
1212 Preservation Park Way
Oakland CA 94612
Fax (510) 645-1892

Comments on Dialogue

"The questions in Dialogue are basic and real for Development Officers. The answers are clear, to the point, and very helpful. Best of all, they are from an experienced grant-maker who speaks from reality, not theory.

Glenn L. Essex
Chairman
Essex & Drake Fund Raising Counsel
San Francisco CA

"I think the concept of Dialogue is one that is needed to keep the lines of communication open between those who are seeking funding and the funders. As in the past, you are once again - with Dialogue - in the forefront of grant making foundations in your efforts to communicate and simplify the grant making process. Keep up the good work!"

Wayne Robson
Director of Development
Easter Seal Society of the Bay Area
San Carlos CA

Dialogue is published in an effort to develop more effective interchange between development officers and funders. It was a development officer who had the idea for Dialogue. It is available free of charge as a service of the Philanthropic Ventures Foundation. This publication is in a trial phase to see if it is useful to the field.

Past issues of Dialogue are available by calling (510) 645-1890

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