

DIALOGUE

A *Periodic Newsletter for Development Officers*

■ Bill Somerville, Editor --
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Dialogue was established to help improve relationships between funders and development officers. *Dialogue* was the idea of a development officer. Readers are welcome to submit questions.

We are grateful to Darla Atwood, Development Officer at Edgewood Center for Children and Families in San Francisco. Ms. Atwood, a senior development executive, is the person who suggested *Dialogue*. She also took the time to develop the questions presented in this issue.

We invite all development persons to submit questions for *Dialogue*.

Q: Sometimes reporting dates and proposal deadlines overlap. I don't feel comfortable reporting and asking in the same letter. Should I concern myself with this or let it go?

A: There should be two separate communications. Don't wait for deadlines; reporting on your progress in a series of letters is a good way of keeping the funder current on your work. Unfortunately, the Editor often gets a letter "Enclosed is our report on the past year. Please consider refunding this program."

Q: Under what circumstances, if any, do you advise not discussing program ideas with the foundation officers before submitting a letter of intent?

A: If the foundation officer is available, go for it. The Editor believes in give and take which often evolves into a negotiated grant. The Editor is put off by the applicant who is trying to find out what to say or who submits a "draft" proposal for corrections.

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Philanthropic Ventures Foundation
1212 Preservation Park Way
Oakland CA 94612

Q: Do foundations discuss pending requests when an organization has submitted proposals to both? If so, what kind of dialogue might they have between them?

A: The Editor is impressed at how ‘proprietary’ foundations are of the proposals they receive. On occasion foundation program officers may discuss an applicant but more often it is a foundation that just received a request calling a foundation that previously funded the applicant. The point to be made is that there is not omnibus meeting by foundations to decide who should and shouldn’t get funds.

Regarding the nature of the dialogue, the Editor tries to see how his colleague feels about the applicant/grantee in an open ended way.

Q: Some foundation staff seem too busy to take a phone call before I submit a letter of intent or proposal. Is this really the case? Don’t foundations have the money to hire enough staff?

A: Too many phone calls to foundations are redundant. For example, the Editor often gets a call asking if he got the fax which was just sent. A call before a letter of intent is redundant in that the call could take the place of the letter. The normal way of communicating with a foundation is the written word. Nevertheless, the Editor is aware of aloofness which creeps into foundation work and it is unacceptable.

Q: Sometimes I feel that our healthy endowment prevents a foundation from giving us funding. How do you feel about this?

A: A healthy endowment usually means a well-established agency. The question here is, is the agency dynamic, taking risks, trying new approaches, reaching out to new population groups? This is what makes them fundable, regardless of their endowment.

Q: I get frustrated by a foundation’s inability to “commit,” i.e. to give more than one year of funding at a time. Wouldn’t it save all of us time if foundations would commit to 2 or 3 years of funding?

A: More and more foundations are willing to consider multiple year funding e.g. Hewlett Foundation but many large foundations budget for one year at a time and if a multiple year grant is given, it all comes out of the present year’s budget. People should ask a foundation to be willing to consider a multi year possibility but to give the grant one year at a time based on the performance of the project.

Q: How can we be more successful at getting the money we really need - general operating funds?

A: We deal with this question in each issue of *Dialogue*. The Editor has identified seven sources of funds for programs: governmental, United Way, foundations, corporations,

fees for service, special projects (events, businesses), individuals - and only seven sources. The skill of the development officer is in using these sources creatively. No one source will continuously give you all you need.

The Editor feels that foundation money is very special i.e. no limitations and consequently it should be used to improve ones efforts, take risks, try new approaches, etc.

Q: How should I respond when a foundation suggests creating a program that they want to see, but the organization has not identified it as a desirable program to develop? (I'd really be chasing the money if I did this.)

A: Good grantmaking represents give and take on the part of all participants. It is not for the funder to tell the agency what to do but often funders can see a new approach to an issue and maybe a negotiated grant can result. If the agency feels put upon, it should speak up and point out why its current program is the best approach.

Q: How can we as development people make your job easier?

A: Let's try some ideas.

Don't:

- present your program as a crisis needing to be rescued
- grovel or be overly solicitous
- be coy or flirtatious
- be demanding or demeaning
- be righteous

Do:

- relate to a foundation person as a colleague
- be ready to discuss and give and take
- keep the funder informed, invite people for site visits
- treat the granting process as an investment process
- be straight forward, candid, honest
- be informed about the program of the agency you represent

Comments on Dialogue

“THANK YOU SOO much for Dialogue. The “What is expected of me in terms of reporting after receiving a foundation grant?” answers were espically helpful.”

**Susan Lynn
Project Second Chance
Pleasant Hill, CA**

Bill Somerville, the Editor of *Dialogue* first started in non-profit work in 1960. From 1960 to 1974 he went to foundations seeking grants for various programs. From 1974 to the present he has been in foundation work, first establishing the Peninsula Community Foundation in San Mateo County, California, and in 1991 creating the Philanthropic Ventures Foundation - a public charity that specializes in innovative grantmaking such as immediate response grants, grantmaking without proposals, high risk grants (in the San Francisco Bay Area only). He also consults with foundations helping them improve their grantmaking. Thus far he has done on site consulting to over 160 foundations.

Fax your questions or comments for *Dialogue* to: (510) 645-1892

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