

Great Partnerships, Key to Funding

by Diane McDonald

As sources of federal and state funding for nonprofit organizations shrink, and competition for dollars increases, grantwriters often ask, "How do I make my application stand out from the crowd?" My advice; work on building a relationship with a potential funder, especially if an opportunity exists in your own back yard.

Funders want to know that they are making a lasting impact with their grant awards; it is important that you build trust and communicate your programs with enthusiasm and integrity. Make an effort to build a lasting partnership.

I came across this brief posting at a site called **White Courtesy Telephone**. In it, Albert lists five great ways to build relationships with funders and shares tips to help you move your relationship from transactional to transformational. Read more here:

[Five Tips for Building Stronger Relationships With Foundations](#)

Posted on White Courtesy Telephone

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It's difficult to make generalizations across the 71,000 grantmaking foundations in the United States. There are nonetheless enough family resemblances among them to make it worth hazarding a few words of advice to fundraisers.

At bottom, fundraisers are in the business of raising money, and foundations are in the business of giving it away. Happy are those whose relationships with foundations can move from the transactional to the transformational.

Here are the tips; your results may vary:

1. **Attend to the basics.** There's no substitute in any working relationship for simple human decency. Be honest in your dealings with foundation staffers—they don't like surprises any more than you do; and be merciful—like you, they're busy and face their own institutional pressures. If a foundation provides detailed application guidelines, follow them closely. Submit a proposal that shows a regard for the values, priorities, and general practices of the foundation. If you're funded, thank the people involved in

making the funding decision. And always keep the communications channels open. You should expect the same decency to be shown to you and your organization.

2. **Get personal.** Move from a paper relationship to one of flesh and blood at your first opportunity. Foundations, like many individual donors, fund *people* not organizations: the heart of their relationship will not be with an entity, but with individuals they believe are capable of doing good work. Often the most accurate predictor of nonprofit success will be the qualities of your executive director: his or her vision, passion, management skills, and ability to marshal resources for the common good. Your executive director should not only inspire but also know his or her way around your organization's financial statements.

3. **Focus on the *so what*.** If you're given a site visit, try to schedule it at a time when your program officer will see children being cared for, people being fed, families being housed. When you make your pitch, focus less on the *what* than on the *so what*. Are you the first, the largest, the best, the only ...? What's important about your work beyond what your program officer can see?

4. **Do your homework.** What can peer organizations tell you about their funding relationship with the foundation in question? Try to anticipate a foundation's unspoken questions: *You've gotten along without our funding so far, so why us and why now? We're already funding ABC, Incorporated: Why does the city need two children's theatres?* Use your Google searches to get a fix on the foundation's obsessions and turn-offs.

5. **Share what you learn.** Relationships go both ways. What does your organization have to offer people in the foundation community? You likely have expert knowledge of a particular field (immigration, say), or of a neighborhood that's of interest to funders. Perhaps you've recently done a study or survey of a key community. Offer to meet with foundation staff to share your knowledge, or better yet, collaborate with other nonprofits to organize a funder briefing on the subject.

