EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND IDEAS COLLECTION (EPIC)

Unit 8 – Asset Development

Chapter 1 – Development Plan

“An organization is a set of relationships that are persistent over time.”

Kevin Kelly

The development plan is a tool to organize your relationship-building efforts. That’s what donordevelopment is all about. The plan is your opportunity to identify with whom you want to start and maintain relationships, how you are going to reach out to them, and the related goals for donors’ charitable giving.

In donor development as in most things, opportunity always outpaces capacity. The developmentplan allows you to set clear priorities for your limited resources, and to rally your full team arounddevelopment goals. By involving your board members and other volunteers in the creation of the plan, you can develop ambassadors who will help you build successful long-term relationships between your foundation and charitable donors.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation’s level of effectiveness in this area:

- There is a written asset development plan indicating long-term goals, immediate actionsteps, and measurable outcomes, as a part of the overall strategic plan.
- The plan includes strategies and tactics to support new donor cultivation.
- The plan includes strategies and tactics to strengthen relationships with existing donors.
- The plan includes strategies and tactics to strengthen relationships with professional advisors.
- The plan includes strategies and tactics to thank donors and encourage future giving.
- The plan includes giving “societies” or other methods to cultivate and recognize gifts appropriately.
- The plan includes strategies and tactics that provide educational opportunities for donors, not-for-profit leaders, and professional advisors.

- Clearly defined ways in which board members can be actively and appropriately involved.
- The plan clearly shows how strategies and tactics correlate to the operational budget.
- The plan clearly shows how strategies and tactics fulfill asset development objectives.
- The board tracks progress toward specific development benchmarks.
- The board reviews the plan regularly to ensure its relevance to mission and current organizational goals.

Stories

Try, Try Again

They say everything can take time. In my first several years at the Foundation, I tried on multipleoccasions to get various community women and board members interested in starting a women's fund or giving circle. The idea just didn't catch fire.

This past spring, we planned the first Women's Luncheon. This time the intent was not to start a fund but to honor women in the community. Things were not looking good when the original speaker had to cancel, but our potential crisis turned out to be a golden opportunity. We contacted the cofounder of the Women's Fund in a nearby community to be our speaker. She was inspirational and by the end of the luncheon there were several women interested in forminga fund for our community. At the next board meeting, the board voted to start the fund, and nearly every board member donated – even the men, who donated in honor of the women in their lives. Now the community is excited and the fund is growing.

What I Learned: Sometimes it takes patience, flexibility, and a bit of luck (even if at first it seemslike bad luck), before an idea takes root.

What I Wish I Knew

- Despite how critical it is that we dedicate time to asset development, it's actually whereexecutive directors of small foundations usually spend the *least* amount of our time. Commit to spending time every week to work on donor development. Block out regular time for it on your schedule so it doesn't get crowded out by other meetings and deadlines.
- It's important to identify your target audience – people who are charitably inclined andhave the capacity to make a gift.
- Don't go after everyone who's ever made a gift to your foundation (many memorial giftsare one-time gifts). Look at the potential return on investment.
- Because you have limited resources, identify within the plan special groups on which tofocus your development efforts.

Red Flags

- *Too many metrics.* You should be able to measure the results of the asset developmentplan with just a handful of measures. You want to spend the majority of your time producing the results, not charting them.
- *Short-term focus.* While dollars raised are one metric, you should have other measurablecriteria related to the cultivation process, such as number of donor visits.

Practical Tips

- One goal of your development plan is to build trust in your foundation and strengthen thereputation of the foundation.
- Make sure your full board has input in the plan. Only with ownership will they follow upon the goals.
- Part of the purpose of the plan is to generate excitement among your volunteers, so theywill help you implement the plan.

Chapter 2 – Cultivating and Educating Donors

"I believe in businesses where you engage in creative thinking,and where you form some of your deepest relationships. If it isn't about the production of the human spirit,we are in big trouble."

Anita Roddick

Foundation leaders go about the business of cultivating donors in a variety of ways. We thankdonors and highlight the impact of their gifts; we communicate with them about foundation activities through print, electronic, and personal contacts as well as events; we tell stories andshare information that helps them learn more about ways to make a difference through our organizations; and we actively get to know them and their individual charitable interests.

Forming deep relationships is the best way to engage donors' highest aspirations – in other words, the best way to cultivate major gifts. That requires individual face-to-face contact.

However, deadline-driven activities like newsletters and events can easily dominate your time. That's why it's critical for staff with development responsibility to set contact goals and block outtime for the activity that promises the single greatest return on investment of any development task: meeting one-on-one with major gift prospects, to understand their motivations, engage their imaginations, and lift up their charitable dreams.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation's level of effectiveness in this area:

- Specific donor groups and constituencies are identified and well defined.
- Gift acknowledgment letters are revised frequently to remain timely and fresh.
- Donors receive a personalized message to thank them for their gift, either separate fromthe IRS-compliant gift acknowledgment letter, or included in it.
- All communication includes an emphasis on the impact of the donors' gifts.
- There are ample opportunities for donors to interact with various foundation representatives. These might include one-on-one, small group, and large group settings.
- There is consistent communication with donors throughout the year.
- Donors are provided numerous opportunities to attend activities relevant to their interests and giving history.
- Donor management software is used and a system is in place to keep information current.
- Contact with donors and plans for follow-up are documented.
- Donors receive fund statements at least annually, and preferably quarterly.
- Donors receive fund statements in the format most convenient for them.

Stories

Don't Judge A Book by Its Cover

In 1995, a couple residing in Southern Indiana established a charitable remainder trust at the local community foundation. There was a story about it in the paper, and a man whom we'll call Ted Smith read the story. A simple, honest man and a hard worker, Ted had made his living as asoldier, farmer, plumber, welder, machinist and tinsmith, among other trades. Ted was inspired by the generosity of the elderly couple written up in the paper for their estate gift – so much so, that he decided he would like to do something generous as well. He wanted to pay off the mortgage to the Moose Lodge.

He went to one of the banks and told the teller that he wanted to pay off the mortgage to the Moose Lodge. The teller, after overcoming her initial confusion, determined that her bank did nothold the mortgage to the Moose Lodge. She called the other banks in town – they did not have the mortgage to the Lodge, either. She called the Moose Lodge and discovered that there was nomortgage; the Lodge owned their building with no debt.

The teller called the bank president, who was also a member of the board of directors of the community foundation, to see if he could help. Seeing an opportunity for the foundation, this savvy board member began asking questions, feeling out Ted's interest in making a charitablecontribution to the foundation. He saw potential, and so called the executive director of the community foundation.

The executive director, bank president and Ted talked and determined that Ted was interested inhelping kids. Ted decided to establish a fund in the community foundation to promote youth philanthropy. Once that decision was made, Ted started pulling cash out of his pockets. He seemed to have no end to wadded up bills. Eventually, the bank president asked the teller to geta box. After Ted's pockets were empty and the money counted, Ted ended up making a $34,000contribution to the foundation to establish a youth philanthropy fund. His gift would shape many young people to become honorable, productive citizens.

What I Learned: That old adage, don't judge a book by its cover, holds true in philanthropy. Younever know who might be the millionaire next door.

Influential Allies

Last year our foundation received a gift of $750,000 from the estate of a donor. Estate gifts arecommon for community foundations, but in this case the gift was unique. Why? Because I nevermet the donor.

Just a month before she died in a nursing home, the donor met with her attorney and the trust officer from her local bank. Both advisors told the donor about the foundation and its work in thecommunity. Her gift created an unrestricted endowment that will enhance the foundation's discretionary grantmaking.

What I Learned: Establish relationships with your professional advisors, because they can serveas development directors for the foundation.

A Donor's Prerogative

We had spent a great deal of time cultivating a donor we will call Bill. A former engineer, Bill had been a widower for many years. He had substantial wealth, and had already made what he felt was an adequate provision for his children.

Despite our many meetings with the donor, we just didn't feel like we were making a connection. Bill asked a lot of questions and he assured us that he had a gift in mind, but we weren't sure of what type of gift Bill would make or even if he would make a gift at all.

After Bill died, we waited for some type of notification of a gift, but no call came. After a couple of years we concluded that our efforts were for naught.

Recently, though, we were notified that we had been named as the remainder beneficiary on a charitable remainder trust. It seems as though Bill had set up a CRT to provide a steady income for a lady friend of his, who had been a local widow. As it was explained to us, Bill thought it was none of our business – or his family's business – how he used his money. He knew that, when it was time for us to know, we would know the nature of his gift.

What I learned: Donors have a right to their privacy. As some point, you need to assume that youhave done all you can and let events take their course.

What I Wish I Knew

- Part of the role of community foundation staff is to accommodate difficult donors for thelong-term benefit of the community.
- Maintain a list of all past board members.
- Tell the story. Tell the story again. Tell the story again. Tell the story again. You have to bein front of the right person at the right time with the right message. Every opportunity could be the right time for someone.
- People get information in lots of different ways, and you never know what is going to bestreach your top prospects – continuously maintain awareness of the foundation through multiple channels.
- Often times you won't know about a major/planned gift you're going to receive until it actually comes to the foundation. Two-thirds of donors won't share that information.

Red Flags

- *Disgruntled donors.* Unhappy donors who believe they are unheard are more than willingto share their experience with others. If you can't make a donor happy by accommodating a particular request, at least acknowledge them and express care and concern for their wishes.

- *Excessive solicitations.* The majority of your touches with donors should be thanking them and informing them about your work and the impact of their gifts.

Practical Tips

- You can never thank someone too much.
- Think of ways to involve board members in helping you thank donors (e.g., phone calls,personal notes).
- Pay attention to what's happening in a donor's life. Know your donors!
- Ask your board members to help keep you advised of events, especially deaths.
- Use knowledge of donors' passions to help make your unrestricted grants more meaningful.
- Use stories to help donors understand the impact they can have.
- Have your donors send you information/history about why they set up a fund, pictures, and other background information to help you record their story for posterity and share itwith others.
- Keep your ex-board members engaged to help preserve the history and story-telling ofthe foundation. Previous board members are all potential donors, especially for bequests.
- Consider a donor survey asking donors what they want (e.g., recognition, invitations, volunteer opportunities, etc.).
- Don't underestimate the importance of pass-through funds as ways for donors to give you a "test drive."
- Prepare written biographies and other stories about your donors. Do it now and you willappreciate having that information long after they are no longer with us.

Chapter 3 – Outreach to Special Groups

"It's easier to treat people properly than to repair broken relationships."

— Frank Sonnenberg,

Perhaps you've had an experience like this one: your board or development committee meets todevelop prospect lists. One person brings donor recognition lists from other local charities.

Another ticks off the five richest people in your service area (even though some of them aren'teven charitable – and everybody is "after" them). Two others throw out names of friends, neighbors and colleagues of theirs – people just like them. In fact, you realize, the names thattend to come up are people who run in the same limited circles as all your board members.

Many of these suspects may turn out to be good prospects for your organizations – and many ofthem will not. But don't limit yourself to the usual suspects. There is a much wider universe of potential donors out there for your foundation, including some of your strongest prospects. To find them, you may need to do things a little differently than you have always done.

Focusing on special groups gives you a chance to develop more targeted outreach strategies –which may show greater results than a scattershot approach. It's also a promising way to broaden and diversify your donor base. It can even help you address a wider array of communityneeds that interest new donors.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation's level of effectiveness in this area:

1. The foundation has a strategy for developing its special groups, based on foundation goals, community need and administrative resources.
2. The foundation hosts numerous events tailored to appropriate specific groups (i.e. professional advisors, women, youth, young professionals, persons of color, persons ofdifferent cultures, farmers, different professions, different wealth categories, etc.).
3. The tools used to recruit members of special groups include mailing lists and other mechanisms of public contact which show diversity of age, residence, gender, incomestatus, and other characteristics.
4. Marketing materials are customized to target groups.

Stories

Professionals with Passion

Special donor groups come in all shapes and sizes. One example of such a group is the employees at Anytown Community Schools. Some of the teachers were involved in the community foundation and wanted to explore how they could use the foundation to further theirpassion: you guessed it, education.

After meeting with the executive director, they decided to establish the Anytown Community Schools Giving Tree Fund. The purpose of the fund is to provide teacher grants to support innovative classroom experiences. The fund is completely supported by payroll deduction by theemployees at Anytown Community Schools. (Anytown has no United Way or similar group gearedtoward workplace giving.) A grant cycle is held the fall of each school year. Thanks to the foresight of these teachers, every year, grants will be awarded to creative teachers who want to enhance the classroom experience of their students.

As you plan to approach “target” donor groups, don’t forget retired teachers. Heavens know theynever made much during their lifetimes, but they don’t spend much, either. And, they have a passion for helping kids. From my experience, they don’t want an aggressive sales pitch. But make sure they know who you are and what you can do. One way to do that is to ask them to serve on your scholarship selection committees.

What I learned: You can’t predict where your large gifts will come from just by looking at someone’s zip code, the car they drive, or the house they live in. Community foundationsare perfectly poised to serve the millionaire next door.

Capitalizing on the Force of Feminine Philanthropy

Women donors have emerged as a power in charitable giving, due to their growing economic status, longer average lifespan, and propensity to give.

Many community foundations have worked to capitalize on these trends – literally – through women's giving programs. Our foundation started a campaign several years ago to involve, inform and empower female donors. We established the Women Helping Others Giving Circle.

In designing the program, our foundation was mindful of how women's giving differs from men's.Women tend to want more information, make decisions more slowly, and desire ongoing involvement that helps them see the positive effective of their giving. Accordingly, our Circle allows women to learn about local nonprofit organizations through presentations and site visits. Early in the year, Circle members choose 4-6 organizations that meet the Circle's mission. Thoseorganizations are then invited to Circle meetings to make presentations. After the presentations,the Circle makes site visits to some of the programs.

In the fall each year, the Circle decides which, if any, of those organizations will be asked to submit a written grant request. Once received, Circle members review the applications and award grants based on the knowledge gained through the presentations and visits.

What I Learned: When you tailor giving experiences to your donors, it usually works. We have found our women's giving circle to be effective in drawing in new donors, deepening donor engagement, and raising awareness of the community foundation's role in philanthropy.

What I Wish I Knew

- Not all special groups are the right fit; choose wisely and consider your exit strategy inadvance.
- There's more potential out there to discover the "special groups" in your community thanyou can often imagine. Brainstorming with your board members to discover those groupscan be helpful. Of course, it will be more helpful if your board membership reflects some of those "special groups" and the diversity within your community; if does not, address that with your nominating committee or governance committee.
- Get references before buying a mailing list.

Red Flags

- *Forgotten donors.* In the excitement of cultivating new donors, don't forget to allocate resources for maintaining relationships with your existing donors as well. Make new friends, but keep the old.
- *Bzzzzzz.* Is your foundation as WASPy as a wasp's nest? Though often well-represented among founders and donors of community foundations, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) men will be outnumbered by other types of donors in the

very near future. Examine the diversity that exists in your community, and consider how to be inclusive ofall potential givers.

Practical Tips

- Ask already established groups to provide you with the opportunity to speak to their constituents about the foundation and how it can help address the needs they perceivein the community. Examples include MOMS Clubs, retired teacher groups, business clubs, clergy associations, and alumni groups.
- Visualize the results you have in mind before starting. What is the goal of developing thisspecial group?
- Since your board and volunteer base should be representative of the community you serve, use those volunteers to help make connections to targeted special groups.
- Sometimes empowering those special groups will help them become actively engaged with the foundation. You can develop giving circles for special groups, invite diverse people to serve on your grantmaking committee(s), and engage a variety of volunteers inyour foundation's special initiatives.
- One way to identify a special group is to analyze your list of donors and see if patternsemerge. What groups are represented that have much more potential? Is any group conspicuous by its absence?

Chapter 4 – Marketing Plans

“The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about.”

Oscar Wilde

A deliberate marketing plan offers your foundation at least three distinct advantages. First, over time, a sound marketing program will bring greater results, with less effort, to your donor development program. Why is that? A well implemented marketing plan will lead to more of your would-be donors self-identifying, sparing you the intensive work of donor acquisition, and bringing donors that you might never have developed on your own. It will help with your proactiveefforts too – when you are reaching out to prospects, your job becomes easier if they already have some awareness of the community foundation’s mission and role in the community.

Second, the marketing plan gives you the opportunity to approach your work with beginner’s mind. As in most professions, it’s easy to get immersed in the intricacies of our particular field and insulated within the overall non-profit sector. We tend to forget that the services, benefits, aspirations and jargon that we swim in daily are foreign to large portions of our external audiences. In planning, we pull up and get the aerial view, making it easier to develop messagesthat will light up others’ hearts and minds with interest and understanding.

Third, planning allows you to zero in on how you want people to view your foundation .When youtake command of your messaging, it helps ensure that not only is your foundation talked about,it’s for all the best reasons.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation’s level of effectiveness in this area:

- The foundation has a marketing plan for its various constituents and functions. (The marketing plan may stand alone, or may be part of a strategic plan or development plan.)
- The plan outlines various means of relating to its constituents based on an objective understanding of their respective needs.
- The plan is a “living document,” reviewed periodically by board and staff.
- A paid or volunteer marketing consultant/firm is used to develop an overall strategy.
- Surveys or other research tools are used to gain accurate, objective information to improve marketing efforts.
- The foundation’s public image and brand are carefully created and protected.

- There is a process to develop key marketing and communication messages, based onthe foundation's mission statement, goals, values and vision.
- All staff and volunteers are made aware of the key marketing messages.

Stories

The People Speak – and Click-Through, and Opt-In

Our women's philanthropy group just celebrated its second year of existence and grantmaking.The group is based around the concept of each woman giving a certain amount and then awarding the total to one organization – in our case, 100 women give $100 each and the full

$10,000 is awarded. Amounts collected over $10,000 are awarded as "runners up" grants. Eachyear we have typically had 7-10 applications and only 3 are chosen as either the grand award winner or as a runner up. We were struggling with how to recognize the organizations who put in the time and effort to apply but weren't chosen to compete for the grand prize.

This year we started the "People's Choice" award via our website. All women's fund applicants were featured and the public was invited to vote for their choice – the winner got $500 to use asthey wished towards the mission of their organization. The idea was for each organization to drive their own constituents to the website to vote. We did no promotion – we only let the individual agencies know of the opportunity. There were limits such as each person could only vote once and had to submit their email address to vote. For the other organizations, it gave them an opportunity to engage their constituents to act on their behalf; for the foundation, it generated significant new web site traffic and captured over 500 email addresses for future outreach activities. The People's Choice award was totally independent of the women's group grant, which is funded through the foundation's donor development budget; as it turned out, different organizations won the People's Choice award and the $10,000 grand prize, so the newaward broadened the feel-good reach of the grant program.

What I Learned: A little friendly competition can create great exposure for the foundation.

A Personal Presentation

We decided to try to involve our grant committee members more deeply in the granting process,going beyond the review of applications and development of funding recommendations. We asked each committee member to team with a member of our board of directors and present grant checks to grantees at their board meetings.

It has worked beautifully. Our foundation representatives get a chance to briefly talk about the foundation to a potentially new group of community volunteers and help make the connection between us and them. It also helps close the loop for our volunteers regarding the impact of thework they are tasked to do. It's a win-win.

What I Learned: Face-to-face connections are the best kind of marketing. Grantmaking presentswonderful opportunities to make those connections.

What I Wish I Knew

- You don't have the money to market to everyone in your community, nor do you need todo that. Focus your message where it will have the most impact.
- Utilize your board members wherever possible.
- Don't be shy about expecting grantee organizations to promote the foundation's work.
- In most cases an annual report is read more before publication than after publication.

Red Flags

- *Trying to be all things to all people.* If you can't identify the target audience, message anddesired outcome, you don't have a good marketing plan.
- *The law of attraction.* You are what you're known to do – make sure you promote the types of funds, projects, partnerships, and so on that are your highest priority to attract,and don't be afraid to downplay other foundation activities if they are low on your list ofmission-driven priorities (i.e., scholarships).
- *Inauthenticity.* Actions speak louder than words – or marketing. Live up to your brand.

Practical Tips

- Every interaction is a marketing opportunity for the foundation.
- Create a messaging brochure to be used internally, so your staff and board members know the appropriate messages to share with which audiences.
- Your grant awards and the impact you have in your community are your best marketingtools.
- Educate your grantees on how they can market your foundation.
- Being a good community partner is a good way to get inexpensive marketing.
- Your mission and programs are part of your marketing message.
- Transparency is a good form of marketing – let people know the process by which grantand scholarship decisions are made.

Chapter 5 – Communication Strategy

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Henry De Bracton

Your marketing plan is a tool to help you be proactive in your communications. But you also needto anticipate how you'll respond when you find yourselves in a reactive stance. What actions will you take if anything happens that could undermine your foundation's desired image – or when unexpected positive coverage falls into your lap? Who speaks on the foundation's behalf to the press? To major donors? A good communication strategy can help assure that you make the most of favorable exposure, while containing any negative coverage that could damage your foundation's reputation.

Assessment

Take this quiz to determine your community foundation's level of effectiveness in this area:

- The foundation has a process in place for dealing with publicity, both positive and negative.
- The foundation has a designated spokesperson and an alternate.
- Timely communication, including the foundation's official response, is provided to staff,board and volunteers when an issue or event occurs.
- Staff and volunteers are instructed to whom to direct any inquiries.
- The foundation has an established relationship with press outlets in the community.

Stories

The Art of Containment

It was a hot August Sunday when the museum opened an exhibit titled "Hands on Society." As executive director of the museum I had curated the exhibit which contained the works of five artists, all of whom used some type of assemblage to make their statements on today's society. Shortly after the exhibit opened to the public the custodian came into my office and asked me tolook out the window and then stated "do you want me to call the police?" Outside the museum was a group of 60 or so individuals protesting the exhibit.

The protest was over a large assemblage of a cross, with a sign above stating: "man hands on misery to man, it deepens like a coastal shelf, get out as early as you can, and don't have any kids yourself." The protest, which lasted until the scheduled close of the exhibit, reflected a variety of concerns, from promotion of suicide to desecration of the cross to satanic symbolism.The individual board members were called Pagans for allowing the exhibit.

My first reaction on that day, fortunately, was the correct one. I told the custodian, “we have theright to show the exhibit and they have the right to picket.” The artist and I went out and talked to the protestors and invited them into the museum for punch and cookies.

One of the first things I did after the start of the protest was to work with the board of directors, keeping them completely informed. We did not have a plan to cover publicity in the event of a public controversy. The board immediately decided to let the Director be the only spokespersonin order to maintain consistency. It was decided to use the facts and avoid the philosophical arguments that were developing. The facts were:

- The museum had the right to show the works of art;
- The works would remain until the end of the scheduled exhibit; and
- The protestors were free to protest on public property.

The museum was front page news seven times during that four week exhibit, and was the focusof hundreds of letters to the editor. People were quick to take sides. As Director, I found it best not to answer phones or go to the grocery store, avoiding long discussions both for and against the works of art. By taking a factual approach, using a single spokesperson, and treating everyone with respect, we avoided further inflaming those who were concerned. Eventually the buzz died down.

What I Learned: In any situation where public perception causes a non-profit to defend itself, there are no winners. It is vital that a plan be developed for such situations, and that it includes who will speak on behalf of the organization. Acting and speaking in a respectful manner is essential.

Getting the Right Information to the Right People at the Right Time

Negative perceptions are often the product of misinformation and misunderstandings. When youhear that people are saying bad things about your foundation it’s important to get clear and accurate information into the hands of your best allies: your board members.

Our foundation responded positively to a request from Planned Parenthood in support of diseasescreening and related health services for people (men and women) who did not otherwise have access to this kind of care. We learned quickly that some people in the community were considering a protest, as they believed that any dollars in support of Planned Parenthood would be dollars in support of abortion.

We used email to promptly alert our board members to the negative feelings in the community and provide them with talking points should they be approached individually. We encouraged them to not be dismissive or argumentative, but to listen and steer specific questions to our executive director. We followed up with additional updates as the situation unfolded, including copies of correspondence between the executive director and constituents who were expressing their concern. This served to provide an additional level of detail and keep board members awareof how the staff was performing in "real time."

Of course, communication is a two-way street. We also encouraged our board members to keepthe foundation staff apprised of what they were hearing, so we could gauge the breadth and intensity of the feelings in the community.

In the end, the protest did not occur in our parking lot, but took the form of a letter-writing campaign. How many letters arrived at our office after all communication? Just two. Still, we werecomforted to know that our board members were well-prepared to discuss the matter in public and at their next meeting.

What I Learned: Two-way communication between board and executive director is essential for handling delicate public relations situations. Keeping cool and reiterating relevant facts will help diffuse tension.

What I Wish I Knew

- It's ok to take time before responding to a story to get all your facts in order.
- You don't have to respond every time someone gives the foundation bad press.
- You need to control the flow of information.
- Realize that there may be community backlash to controversial grants (or grants made tocontroversial organizations) – be prepared to deal with it.
- The community has a long memory. Work to avoid problems. If an incident does occur, and your foundation bears some responsibility, the foundation should act in good faith toamend the situation.

Red Flags

- *Jumping the gun.* If you respond too quickly, before you have all the facts, you may fuelthe fire.
- *Repeating the question in the answer.* You don't need to emphasize the asker's framingof the issue by repeating the question as asked. Respond to the issue in your own wordsand from your own perspective.

- *Directly contradicting accusers.* “Don’t” is one of the least-heard words in the English language. Your response will sound less defensive and more positive if you use affirming words. For example, instead of responding to implications of favoritism in the grant process by saying “We don’t play favorites among applicants that have ties to our board or grant committee,” you could make a statement like this: “The foundation conducts a rigorous, objective evaluation of grant applications and excludes any party with a conflict of interest on a particular proposal from participating in the review of that application. Weregret that funds are not sufficient to allow funding of all of the projects that merit support.”
- *Surprising the board.* The five worst words to hear from your board chair: “Have you seenthe paper?” Warn the board in advance if you anticipate adverse coverage. If it does occur, alert them immediately. Include a reminder of who is authorized to speak officially for the foundation, and inform them of how all foundation representatives should address the issue in private conversations, for a consistent, effective response.

Practical Tips

- Rather than directly responding to a particular incident, referencing your policies and procedures may be an adequate response.
- Media should have some way to reach you during off hours.
- Learn from your mistakes so it doesn’t happen again.

Questions?

Have questions about this information? Please contact us.

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