Part Six

Corporate and Foundation Support

Corporations and foundations—important sources of support for higher education—differ from individual donors in significant ways. This means that the corporate or foundation development officer must possess specialized knowledge and skills.

Corporate support increased significantly in the first half of the 1980s but has leveled off since the middle of the decade. As I write this, the national economy is in the grips of a recession that is tightening corporate giving, at least temporarily, and creating a highly competitive situation for corporate fund-seekers. In addition, trends in the giving patterns of corporations are requiring new and carefully targeted strategies for solicitation.

While foundations always have provided a relatively small percentage of total support for most institutions, they are the most logical source for certain kinds of needs. In addition, gifts and grants from foundations have a “prestige value” that makes them highly desired by colleges and universities. As with corporate giving, the patterns of foundation support have changed, and development officers must be aware of these trends when assessing foundations as possible sources of support.

In Chapter 16, Chris Withers summarizes trends in corporate giving and describes strategies for cultivating corporate interest and soliciting support. In Chapter 17, Max Smith provides a companion analysis of the types of foundations, patterns in foundation giving, and methods for managing foundation relations programs.

Giving programs at many corporations and foundations are highly professional and require formal approaches. Funding decisions typically involve committees, or at least more than one individual. Often, this means the grantseeker must prepare a
written proposal. In the final chapter of this section, Sarah Godfrey offers guidelines on how to write an effective request for corporate or foundation support. As Godfrey emphasizes, success depends not only on the quality of the proposal as a writing project, but also on the degree to which the writer can put himself or herself in the place of the grantmaker and relate the proposed project to the corporation's or foundation's own objectives. As an old fundraising adage says, "The case must be larger than the institution."
Securing corporate and foundation support often depends on presenting a well-written, persuasive proposal. The proposal's winning edge lies in its ability to show how the institution and the foundation or corporation can form a partnership that will benefit both. The most innovative and exemplary program will not be funded unless the proposal explains how the program will fulfill the grantmaker's objectives.

Virtually every foundation and corporation has a set of goals and objectives that it wishes to meet through its philanthropic activity. These objectives may be as broad as "to improve the quality of education in the United States" or as narrow as "to decrease the dropout rate among high-school students in Smith County." A grantmaker cannot accomplish its objectives without the participation of the institutions it funds—such as schools, colleges, and universities. The grantmaker and the grant recipient act in partnership to carry out programs and projects that fulfill a shared mission.

This notion of partnership is fundamental to the preparation of a good proposal. Seen in this light, the proposal's purpose is to explain how the foundation's or corporation's dollars can combine with the institution's resources to bring about changes that both parties desire.

A well-written proposal covers all the pertinent information in a concise, logical, and compelling manner. The development of such a proposal typically follows a certain series of steps and addresses a standard set of questions.

**RESEARCHING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The first step in preparing a successful proposal is to identify those foundations or corporations whose objectives appear to
match those of your institution’s particular project. Directories such as those published by the Foundation Center and the Taft Corporation offer extensive information on the philanthropic activity of the nation’s grantmakers and often provide specific categories of interest. A search through these directories helps in developing a list of possible funding sources and in eliminating those foundations and corporations whose interests are not likely to match yours.

You must then carefully research those prospects to identify those whose past grants most closely match the grant you seek, both in program content and dollar amount. The best sources for this information are the annual reports and other printed information distributed by the grantmakers. Read these publications carefully. What is the foundation or corporation’s philosophy of giving? What does it hope to accomplish through its grantmaking? What types of projects has it recently funded that seem to exemplify these objectives?

As you conduct this research and consider your own project, keep in mind the fundamental difference in motivation between foundation giving and corporate giving. Most foundations are altruistic in their grantmaking and seek to bring about a change in society. Corporations, however, are accountable to employees and stockholders. Their motivation is *quid pro quo*: They seek programs and projects that will directly benefit the corporation and the community it serves.

Be sure to review your own files: A foundation or corporation that has supported your institution in the past may be an excellent source for your new project. Perhaps a faculty member has been in contact recently with a particular foundation or corporation. What can he or she add to the profile you are developing? Board members, trustees, and other key volunteers frequently are good sources of information, particularly when they have a personal or professional contact with the grantmaker in question.

After you have developed a profile of a foundation or corporation you believe to be a good match, call and ask to speak to the program officer responsible for the area in which you are interested. Describe your project briefly and ask if it is consistent with the grantmaker’s objectives. Can the program officer provide you with additional information or advice? You may not always be able to have an extensive discussion, but it is worth your effort to call.
The information you gather inevitably will save time for both you and the program officer.

DEFINING THE LARGER PROBLEM

As you move forward with identifying an appropriate source of support, it may help to take a second look at your project or program. Try to evaluate its general purpose through the eyes of a grantmaker.

Almost every project arises out of a need that extends beyond the campus walls. Amid daily pressures and the rush to secure funding, we may lose sight of the larger significance of the projects for which we seek support. We view our projects from the “we need” perspective: “We need a new language laboratory”; “We need a new gym”; “We need remedial reading programs.” We see our projects as ends unto themselves, not as ways to address problems that affect all of higher education or society.

Grantmakers look at the larger picture and then evaluate how our projects may help improve that picture. They regard our projects as the means to accomplish broader objectives: to prepare students to live in the global village; to encourage healthy exercise as a means of disease prevention; to lower the adult illiteracy rate.

Before you begin to write a proposal, you must understand the greater problem that your project will address. Ask yourself, “Why would XYZ Foundation want to fund this project?” The answer is probably not, “To make Ivy College a better place.” The XYZ Foundation does not particularly care that Ivy College’s science laboratories are scattered across campus and suffer from twenty years of deferred maintenance. It may be interested, however, in the ways in which Ivy College proposes to address the national decline in science education by creating a centralized environment for scientific learning.

Keep in mind that a program officer may review up to 100 proposals each week and most likely will have to give clear justification for selecting yours for further consideration. That justification lies in the degree to which your project’s objectives match those of the foundation. This shift in perspective from your need to the grantmaker’s objectives is crucial. If the larger issue inherent in your project is not clear to you, go back to the faculty and administrators involved and ask them to address the issue.
DETERMINING THE CONTENT

Understanding the ways in which your project will help fulfill a grantmaker’s goals is the key to tailoring your proposal to a particular recipient. It should be obvious that the “shotgun” or “boilerplate” method—sending identical proposals to a list of foundations and corporations—is not effective. Each proposal should be written for a specific audience and should reflect a clear understanding of the ways in which a partnership can be created.

As you prepare a proposal, you should follow the grantmaker’s specifications. When the grantmaker does not provide guidelines, or when the specifications indicate only maximum page length, be sure the proposal answers the following questions: 1

1. What is the issue to be addressed?
2. Why is your institution the best place to address it?
3. What changes will the project bring about?
4. How will you accomplish these changes?
5. What do you need (time, funding, people) to do it?
6. How will you gauge your success?
7. Why are you sending this particular proposal? Can you make a special appeal to this source?

WRITING THE PROPOSAL

In general, proposals can take any of three formats: a letter-proposal (one to two pages); a standard proposal (three to five pages) with a cover letter; and a longer proposal (over six pages) with a cover letter and an executive summary. Most foundations and corporations now specify which format they wish to receive. Because of the ever-increasing volume of applications, the trend is toward the letter-proposal, especially for initial inquiries. All three formats should contain information that addresses the seven questions above.

The structure of a standard proposal or a longer proposal generally should follow this outline:

I. Introduction
   A. The issue
   B. Your institution’s plan to address the issue
   C. The amount of your request and the foundation/corporation from which you are requesting it
II. Project Description
   A. More about the issue
      1. What needs to be changed or improved? How do you know?
      2. Why is it important to address this issue?
   B. How does your institution plan to address this issue?
      1. What do you propose to do?
      2. What have others done?
      3. Why is your institution's approach better?
   C. What will it take to address the issue?
      1. People
      2. Other resources (space, equipment, etc.)
      3. Funding
   D. How will you know that you have successfully addressed the issue?
      1. What do you wish to accomplish?
      2. What will your next steps be?
      3. How will the project continue after the conclusion of the grant period?
   E. Why is your institution an excellent place to address the issue?
      1. What have you done in the past that has prepared you to address the issue?
      2. What is happening at your institution now to enhance your position?
      3. What resources are you contributing (talent, time, space, money)?
      4. What financial resources, if any, are you getting from extramural sources?
   F. Why would a grant from this foundation/corporation to your institution for this project be especially appropriate?
      1. Mutual rewards
      2. Relationship—appreciation of past support from this grantmaker

III. Conclusion
   A. Summary, including amount of request
   B. Thanks

IV. Appendices
   A. Budget and budget narrative
B. Specific information pertaining to the project
C. Pertinent general information, such as background on your institution
D. Curricula vitae of faculty members and other key people involved in the project

Following are some guidelines you should keep in mind as you write.

**The Introduction**

As you prepare your proposal, remember that the person who will review it may have 10 to 20 other proposals to read that day. The reviewer usually does not have quantities of time to spend on each proposal, nor can he or she take time to try to decipher what it is you are requesting. You can make your proposal more competitive by stating at the outset what it is that your institution proposes to do. Begin your proposal with a concise introductory paragraph that, in a few sentences, states the name of your institution, what it proposes to do, and the amount of funding you are seeking. Do not make the reviewer read through three or four pages to determine why you are writing.

**The Body**

You should construct the body of your proposal with short paragraphs that present the material clearly and logically. Avoid the temptation to tell everything you know about the subject; include only the information that supports your case. Put yourself in the position of the reviewer, and consider the volumes of material that he or she may have to read each day. Your proposal will be easier to assess if you include only the important information.

Keep in mind, also, that the decision-makers at many foundations and corporations never actually read the proposal that you submit. They read, instead, a synopsis—an evaluation sheet or a check list prepared by a staff member who reviews your proposal. These formats present only the essential information. It is to your institution's advantage to make this information easily discernable in your proposal. If a proposal longer than three to five pages is necessary, include a one-page executive summary to give the reviewer an immediate understanding of the key elements.
Tone

The tone of a good proposal should err on the side of understatement. Let the facts about your institution and the plans for your project speak for themselves. Remember that you are presenting your institution as a candidate for an important partnership. Avoid a tone that is self-satisfied or condescending. Avoid, as well, the other extreme; a proposal that grovels or shows a sense of inferiority will not be attractive to the reader. If you have done your homework and you know why your project is a good match with the grantmaker’s objectives, you should not have to explain the reasons you provide for why your proposal should be funded. Do not tell the grantmaker how to make its grants.

Involvement of Others

Many proposals come about because of personal relationships that you institution’s faculty, administrators, and volunteers develop with board or staff members at a foundation or corporation. These contacts are invaluable, and it is usually appropriate to mention them in the cover letter or in the body of a letter-proposal. You must maintain a fine balance so that you do not sound presumptuous. Often, you can mention people by thanking them for their help. If you mention an individual other than the person to whom you address the proposal, send a copy to that person.

Appendices

Select with care the appendices to your proposal. Generally, information that supports your case or further explains a specific point should be included in an appendix. Detailed budgets and budget narratives often appear as appendices because their inclusion in the text of the proposal would interrupt its flow. Curricula vitae of the faculty involved in the project usually belong as appendices, as do histories of your institution and general descriptions of academic and extracurricular strengths. Most foundations and corporations require copies of your institution’s tax-exempt status, a list of names of trustees, and a recent audited financial statement. These and similar documents should appear as appendices.
FINAL STEPS

Wonderful proposals can lose much of their strength in the editing process, particularly if several individuals review the copy. The proposal may lose clarity, continuity, and its sense of urgency. It is important to have one final reader to read the proposal to make sure that it makes sense, it presents its material logically, and it maintains a consistent tone and style. Often the most effective reader at this point is someone who has not been involved in preparing the proposal. This “outside eye” can point out weaknesses and tell you whether the proposal is logical and compelling.

The institution’s highest-ranking administrator should sign the proposal-letter or the cover letter, as evidence of institutional endorsement. If a trustee or another volunteer has played an important role in bringing the proposal to the attention of a particular foundation or corporation, note that you are sending a copy to this individual.

The most effective packaging of your proposal lies in its content, not in a slick presentation. Recipients often discard fancy bindings because they are cumbersome. Many reviewers also put stock in the adage, “the glossier the presentation, the weaker the content.” Unless the guidelines indicate otherwise, the best presentation is to type the proposal neatly and bind it simply.

SUMMARY

The key to a good proposal is its ability to establish a partnership between your institution and the grantmaker. To write a successful proposal, you must understand the funding objectives of a particular foundation or corporation and be able to explain the ways in which your project will help meet those objectives. If you present information in a style that is clear and compelling, you will enhance the case for this partnership and give your proposal a competitive edge.

NOTE

1. These questions and the outline following them were developed over several years, with the help of many experts, for the “Writing Winning Proposals” workshop conducted by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.