grantcraft
PRACTICAL WISDOM FOR GRANTMAKERS

SAYING YES/ SAYING NO TO APPLICANTS

GRANTCRAFT

A service of the FOUNDATION CENTER

saying yes / saying no to applicants

contents

THERE ARE THREE good occasions to explore the points covered in this guide.

■ When you're stuck in a particularly difficult decision-giving muddle you find yourself procrastinating, worrying, and doubting yourself and want to unpack and deal with the situation.

■ If you find you have a chronic reluctance about decision giving, and would like to develop a better understanding and approach to it.

■ When your foundation is reviewing its processes and approaches, and you would like to identify ways it could support a more effective decision-giving process.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Introduction

"I often feel uncomfortable about saying No to applicants. How do I know this proposal isn't going to work? Am I missing something? What if it really turns out to be a great project?"

— Grant maker, on the lingering doubts that accompany most of her rejections

"It takes an enormous amount of fortitude to say No directly. It is unreasonable to expect individual program officers to sustain the courage of the Lone Ranger. Part of the fortitude has to be provided by the president and the board."

— Michael Hooker, "Moral Values and Private Philanthropy," in Social Philosophy and Policy (Vol. 4, Issue 2)

"Grant seekers might hear the 'yes' and not the 'let's negotiate.' It's better to warn them early on where you think the limits are, saying 'I like this and I'm going to recommend it. We can negotiate the details later, but you should know right now that I won't be able to fund what you requested. Here's my limit.' Then they're not blindsided down the road."

— Foundation executive, on handling a Yes

Grant makers spend so much time engaged in decision making that they may not give much thought to decision *giving* — the way they communicate their foundation's decisions to grant seekers. Nor would much thought be needed, if the challenge were as simple as it seems. At first glance, it does seem a straightforward matter of efficiency and etiquette: Every inquiry or proposal requires a response. The best responses will be prompt, polite, and clear. Additionally, because of the disappointment they cause, Nos should be sympathetic. If possible, they should offer some encouragement or helpful feedback. Hardly anyone would disagree with any of this.

But when we took a second look at these tactics — through discussions with grant makers from a variety of foundations, as well as with some reality-checking grant seekers — the challenge of decision giving appeared considerably more complicated.

WHERE THE EXAMPLES COME FROM

This GrantCraft guide was developed through a series of conversations with grant makers and others in the nonprofit community who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights about decision giving. In this guide, more than two dozen grant makers, both newcomers and veterans, explore the dynamics of decision giving as it plays out in a variety of foundations with different missions, cultures, and institutional profiles.

A list of those who contributed their thoughts and experiences is on page 25.

When invited to reflect on their experiences, grant makers described both unexpected pitfalls of saying Yes and troubling dynamics of saying No: They are often uncertain about how much of an explanation to give for their decisions. They sometimes feel pressed into making painful trade-offs between etiquette and efficiency. They have trouble walking the line between engaging grant seekers and inflating their expectations. They feel resolute one moment, uncertain and prone to procrastinate another.

These reflections present a challenge to the simple formulation of decision giving based on efficiency and etiquette. Judging from grant makers' accounts, the efficiency-and-etiquette formula seems to violate Einstein's famous advice to "make things as simple as possible, but not one bit more." This guide uses practitioner experiences and reflections to understand where the efficiency-and-etiquette formulation may simply be *too* simple. And it proposes an approach that grant makers can use to handle even the most complicated aspects of decision giving.

Those wondering whether they can afford the time and energy required to improve their decision giving may find it helpful to consider how much of their job is consumed with just that activity. In response to an informal list-serve query, grant managers recently reported that, on average, their foundations approved only about 25 percent of the requests they receive. Even accounting for "automatic" turn-downs — requests turned away immediately because they fall outside a foundation's guidelines — saying No still involves a great deal of the grant maker's time. And considering the number of proposals and inquiries they prepare, it's a significant part of the nonprofit leader's job as well. Both stand to gain from better decision giving.

Grant makers did not describe decision giving as a discrete, routine interaction that they could handle with a few tested, standard techniques. Instead, they described unfolding decision giving situations, parts of which were well beyond their control. The situations are shaped by both the grant seeker's tactics and the culture and practices of the grant maker's institution. And when the grant maker brings his own baggage along — sometimes in the form of unexamined interpersonal habits and uncertainty about the grant-making role itself — the situations can quickly become murky.

In this light, the challenge for grant makers is not in communicating decisions per se, but in *understanding and managing different decision-giving situations*. How can grant makers do this? Heeding Einstein's keep-it-simple advice, we can sum up the practical wisdom from the grant makers who contributed to this guide as five points, which we explore by turn in this guide.

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING DECISION GIVING SITUATIONS

■ Remember the basic rules of good decision giving.

■ Understand the rationale for your decision — and its implications.

■ Understand and manage grant seeker expectations.

■ Understand how your institution shapes decision giving.

■ Understand the difference between your personal identity and professional role.

The Basic Rules

It's almost hard to imagine how reviewing the basic rules of decision giving could be useful. People who need to be educated on basic points of etiquette and interpersonal communication are unlikely to heed them. And people who find the rules intuitively sensible may find it unnecessary to reflect on them. But as grant makers indicated in recounting their experiences, people who are unfailingly polite and aware of interpersonal dynamics in most situations can find that their instincts fail them in some decision-giving situations — for reasons we'll explore in a moment. Since they are the foundation of good decision giving, we summarize the basic rules here as four points:

■ **Disclose your goals and guidelines.** Try to spare grant seekers the trouble of developing proposals that have little chance of approval by sharing as much as you can about the foundation's interests, goals, and guidelines. Written guidance is a good start, but often not enough. To deal with the gray areas that many hopeful grant seekers will see even in your most black-and-white guidelines, some foundations welcome e-mails or phone calls to offer advice. Others organize meet-the-foundation sessions that help prospective grant seekers learn about the foundation's interests. The purpose of all these methods, as one grant maker put it, is "to create a strike zone through which the pitches need to come."

■ **Be prompt.** The next best thing to a Yes is a prompt No. Knowing where they stand as soon as possible helps grant seekers control their expectations and eliminate one more bit of the uncertainty they face in managing their organizations. When a prompt answer simply isn't possible — because of board schedules or the demands of due diligence — giving the grant seeker an estimated time of response can be helpful.

■ **Offer clear, helpful explanations.** For grant seekers who are hoping for — if not expecting — a Yes, getting an unexplained No is not only disappointing but frustrating. They want to know why they were rejected, what would make them more competitive, whether they should come back to the foundation, and how to improve their chances of getting funding, there or elsewhere. "Whatever else," said one grant maker, giving some feedback "helps to demonstrate that you understand their proposal." Acknowledging that you understand the proposal and explaining the reasons for your decline can provide some of that helpful feedback. The last refuge of indifferent decision givers — explaining that there were more applications than there were grant dollars — offers less than nothing: no money, and no feedback.

■ **Be polite.** Beyond the basic courtesy, the challenge is to be kind while *also* being firm and, perhaps, pointing out weaknesses in the proposal. In these situations, being polite requires not just manners but also sensitivity.

The biggest mistake grant makers can make with the rules is to assume that *knowing* them is sufficient to handle decision giving effectively. It's knowing how to use them — particularly in the face of complications and uncertainties — that poses the challenge.

The Rationale for Your Decision and Its Implications

In decision giving — especially with Nos — rationale is destiny. Some rationales lend themselves well to a simple efficiency-and-etiquette approach and make for smooth decision giving. Others seem to defy that approach at every turn, and create decision-giving dilemmas. The first step in managing the decision-giving situation is to know which rationale you're dealing with and to spot the implications.

The grant makers who contributed to this guide described three No rationales:

- **The Categorical No:** Some proposals, on their face, simply don't meet the foundation's goals or guidelines. They are categorically disqualified. Whatever their substantive merits, in terms of the guidelines they are from the wrong region, for the wrong cause, or request the wrong type of grant. Many grant makers never see these applications. They're weeded out by support staff.

- **The Policy No:** Some proposals do conform to all the foundation's goals and guidelines, but propose a policy or strategy that the foundation doesn't favor. Grant seeker and grantor might be united in a cause but differ on their approaches. For example, they might both be committed to reducing youth-gang activity in a given city. But one favors a crime-control model that prosecutes gang members, and the other a developmental model that seeks to offer youth constructive alternatives to gang life. According to most of the grant makers we spoke to — and grant seekers as well — it's best to acknowledge the disagreement. Said one grant maker: "Sometimes you should just say, 'This is interesting, but I really don't think this method is going to get you to the result you're envisioning.'"

- **The Personal-Judgment No:** Some proposals fit the foundation's goals and share the foundation's strategies, but their success or suitability is in doubt for other reasons: lack of confidence in the organization's capacity, doubts about the competence of its leadership, or worries about its motives or values.

Each No implies a different way of handling the basic rules of good decision giving. For example, a Categorical No doesn't require much of an explanation; simply pointing out the mismatch between the proposal and the guidelines will do. But a Policy No requires more explanation. Grant seekers will want to understand how their strategy differs from yours. And the No may produce more complicated dynamics. You might find that a grant seeker will attempt to persuade you that your concern is misguided. It helps to have an approach to these situations that reflects your understanding of your job. One grant maker reported she has simply learned over time "to be more confident in expressing my judgments to people so that I don't get into long discussions or pseudo-arguments." But for another grant maker, engaging in dialogue with grant seekers "is why I am here." He sees it as part of his job to help grant seekers turn an unpromising proposal into a better one. The key for both, however, is that they understand the dynamics of giving a Policy No and are prepared for it.

Personal-Judgment Nos pose the trickiest challenges. Reflecting on a case where the "program really fit, but the person was problematic," one grant maker recalled struggling with whether and how to offer feedback on a decline he was making after a long period of back-and-forth with the grant seeker. The honest version would point out that the grant seeker had a bad reputation for collaborating, as well as an abrasive style — both very troubling for the type of organizing work he proposed to do. The grant maker eventually did give the feedback, feeling he was obliged after all their discussions to explain his reasoning. But it was painful for both.

In several instances, grant makers found a Personal-Judgment No to be difficult because it was not the grant maker's *own* personal judgment, but that of trustees who vetoed the recommendation for approval. "I don't feel guilty saying No when an applicant is clearly not in the guidelines or doesn't have a good proposal," said one program officer. "I feel guilty when I've assisted the applicant in proposal development, then brought it all the way to the board, and they reverse my decision." Another said, "I feel I haven't done my job well enough if I haven't delivered the No earlier to the applicant."

Other grant makers pointed out that part of that job is to work with executives and trustees — outside of discussions about pending grant proposals. They emphasize the need to educate them about your general strategies and the types of programs and organizations that those strategies involve, and to gauge their support for your approach. As one grant maker said, "Boards tend to feel blindsided when the first time they hear of something new is when they have to approve it."

In some cases, the grant maker understands the rationale for her No, but doesn't use that understanding to manage the decision-giving situation. For example, some grant makers recounted cases where they had recommended a No on the basis of a personal judgment about the grant seeker's organizational or personal capacity to get the job done, but explained their reasoning to the grant seeker as a Policy No. They hoped this would spare both them and the grant seeker awkward or painful conversations. The problem arises, of course, when the grant seeker returns with a revised proposal that addresses the purported policy disagreement. One grant maker has learned to do it right the first time. Agonizing over how to explain a No, he says, can be like "struggling to get a car out of a tight parking spot. You can get hung up on someone's bumper and you're afraid to move, so you just freeze. The key thing is to move and get the scraping over with."

Understanding your rationale will help you anticipate how much scraping you're in for and make you that much better prepared to move.

Mini-Case Study: Giving the Full Story
Rationale Statements

One large community foundation has responded to grantees' common requests for candid feedback about their applications with a written "rationale statement" that explains exactly why the foundation has approved or declined a request.

In a large Western city, many applicants to the local community foundation get an enclosure along with a letter approving or declining their grant proposal. This "rationale statement" gives each grant seeker a detailed account of how and why the foundation arrived at its decision.

In a rationale statement accompanying one recent turn-down, for example, the foundation crisply reviewed its thinking. Along with worries about high per-client costs, the statement expressed concerns about a rocky leadership transition. After the departure of its first executive director, the applicant organization was being run by its founder and volunteer board (which, the foundation thought, was not meeting often enough to keep up with its temporary management role). The upshot: "We prefer not to fund until a permanent management structure is in place."

From the same docket, another grant seeker received, along with a check, a rationale statement outlining what the foundation saw as its strengths: participation of all board members in fundraising, "sound fiscal oversight" that had created a "diverse funding base," and thoughtful collaboration with other nonprofits that enhanced the foundation's leverage.

The foundation gives rationale statements to about 60 percent of its grantees. Those applying to donor-advised funds do not get a statement, nor do those who do not get on to the docket (generally because their proposals fall outside the foundation's guidelines). All grant seekers who get a site visit receive rationale statements with their letter.

In part, says the foundation's vice president for programs, the rationale statement reflects the foundation's desire to create an open and constructive grantor-grantee relationship. "It makes grant making less mysterious," she says, adding that "even when you're *getting* a grant, [the process] can be mysterious."

Beyond promoting a more open relationship, the foundation sees the rationale statement as "a form of capacity building." After feedback pointing out some deficits, the vice-president explains, the grant seeker might return with a stronger proposal the following year. Other grantees call to discuss the feedback, asking for advice about how to proceed. In some cases, the foundation will invite the grant seeker to apply to its technical assistance fund for a grant to deal with a specific weakness cited in the rationale statement.

Even when the grant seeker gets a *Yes,* staff members believe the rationale statements are important. In addition to providing encouragement to strong nonprofits, they help clarify the foundation's expectations and reinforce important goals.

And grantees, in cases of both Yes and No, have reported that the rationale statements are important tools for focusing their boards on challenges they need to work on. "Especially when it comes with a check," the program vice-president remarks, "boards will sit up and listen."

Although the statements can be a "bit of a pain to prepare," she adds that "program officers see them as a very important tool in their work. It gives them an opportunity to give input that grantees find useful."

Grant Seeker Expectations

While you're helping the foundation arrive at a decision and getting ready to give it, grant seekers are waiting hopefully to hear Yes. Understanding what's influencing their expectations can help you understand the dynamics of decision giving. Even better, if you understand how your personal style or your institution's approach might be needlessly raising expectations, you can manage expectations.

One grant maker has developed a simple test to check how her interactions with grant seekers might be raising expectations inappropriately: "I always ask, 'What is my goal in this situation? Why am I asking a grant seeker for ideas about the field? Why am I making this site visit?' If the goals seem sensible, I go out of my way to state them before I ask anything from a grant seeker. If I'm uncertain about the goals, I'll know that the grant seeker probably will be as well, and that's when expectations get raised too high."

More specifically, the grant makers who contributed to this guide referred to six scenarios where they have seen grant seeker expectations get inflated:

"I wanted their thinking, not necessarily a proposal."

Grant makers are frequently in dialogue with nonprofit leaders, trying to develop effective strategies by asking their advice. But because others see the grant maker's job as *making grants*, even casual exchanges of information or ideas are often followed, days later, by an unexpected grant request. "It's magical thinking on both parts," said the president of one foundation. "Sometimes the program officer can lead people on with excitement about ideas, and then be horrified to get a proposal." While resigning themselves to the fact that many will treat *any* conversation with them as a fundraising meeting, grant makers can emphasize when they're simply in the field trying to learn, sometimes with no grant budget to disburse.

"Applicants are reading too much into my site visits."

For grant seekers, a site visit often signals — whatever the real facts — that the foundation is virtually certain to make a grant. The normal etiquette of visiting can often leave grant seekers even more hopeful. A visiting grant maker, out of courtesy or genuine appreciation of the organization, can raise expectations further by just by making an approving comment.

Having learned about these dynamics the hard way, some grant makers simply limit site visits to avoid raising hopes. They make visits only after a grant is already made, or when there is a high chance a grant will follow. (This, of course, reinforces grant seekers' conclusions that site visits are reliable predictors of grant approvals.)

Others are aware that they might give up important learning opportunities simply to avoid tricky interpersonal dynamics, so they forge ahead with site visits. Some seek a middle course — between a total ban on site visits and liberal site visiting that

leaves a trail of crushed hopes — by controlling expectations *during* visits. One grant maker has developed her own protocol: "During site visits, I'm aware of myself, my temperament, what I say, and how I say it. I maintain an awareness of my vocabulary. The more time I spend, the higher I feel their expectations will be."

Another grant maker makes frequent site visits, but discloses very candidly any doubts she might have: "If I know I am going to recommend a turndown, I often tell them this toward the end of the site visit. It takes a lot of courage on my part to say, and it expects a lot of professionalism on their part to hear."

"I asked for a lot of revisions to the proposal, but now I can see it's not going to work."

A grant seeker who submits a proposal over the transom and gets a prompt, polite No has little grounds for feeling led on. The effort involved is part of the cost of fundraising. But when the No comes at the end of extensive discussion with a grantor — as when a grant maker suggests revisions to a proposal, asks for evaluation plans, or wants the budget in a different format — grant seekers may be understandably resentful. It's not just that their expectations were raised and then dashed, but their time was (in their view) wasted. Some grant makers suggest sharing uncertainty with a clear message. Instead of the common perfunctory warning — "It's the board's decision, not mine" — something that signals the risk will help more, such as: "I'm

honestly not sure how much progress we're making with these revisions. I'm willing to keep trying, but you really have to decide whether you want to keep working on this."

"The longer I took to do the review, the more they thought we were headed to a Yes."

Like a defendant watching the clock during jury deliberations, some grant seekers will assume that the longer the decision takes, the better the outcome will be. But sometimes grant makers withhold a response because they are legitimately uncertain what to do. They want more information or want to see how their budget shapes up later in the year. Some explain the situation to the grant seeker and promise to be in touch at a set time. Others shift the burden to the applicants, suggesting they check in later. A few even opt to decline proposals that they actually see as pending. This eliminates uncertainty for the grant seeker and then, if the grant is approved later, "it's a pleasant surprise."

"The applicant is a friend and former colleague."

Especially for new grant makers, the experience of declining proposals made by friends or former colleagues can be especially difficult. Your friends are delighted to have a chance to appeal to someone they see as a like-minded colleague who has struck it rich, and you're distressed to have to let them know that friendship won't suffice. The

grant maker's experience here might be akin to that of the political activist who finally wins an election and, in facing the hard tasks of governing, is accused of betraying friends or selling out the cause. Short of not having any close colleagues or of funding them heedlessly, there is little for a grant maker to do here beyond preparing mentally and explaining, as with other applicants, where personal friendships and institutional roles part — a critical distinction we return to in a moment.

"Our priorities have changed, and I have to reject some current grantees."

Many program officers bear the burden of announcing that new guidelines exclude grantees previously supported by the foundation. "Sometimes people are doing excellent work, and we've even nurtured them," said one grant maker, "and you feel really bad about having to say No to them." If the foundation permits transition or "tie-off" funding, this is obviously a place to use it.

Short of that, some grant makers attempt to help grantees identify other funding prospects, and may even help in approaching those other funders — a considerable effort for those who face multiple disqualified grantees.

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The grant seeker who tries to control every budding expectation is likely to end up inaccessible and disengaged. Instead of attempting to control expectations, acknowledging them can sometimes mean the difference between good and bad decision giving. A perfunctory No might do when a grant seeker is tossing a short letter of inquiry over the transom; the decision giving style fits the expectations. But more explanation — and some acknowledgment of the disappointing outcome — will be required when a long-term grantee has worked for several months to revise a proposal that ends up being declined. Not taking the difference into account is what produces the problem.

Mini-Case Study: Face-to-Face Decision Giving

One experienced grant maker interviewed for this guide has concluded that there is only one satisfactory way to communicate a No: in a personal, 20-minute conversation — which most grant makers feel they don't have time for. Yet at least one foundation does exactly this. It responds to all applications for major grants face-to-face, in a meeting at the foundation's offices. It puts to the test those grant seekers who say they really want personal contact with and feedback from foundations.

Several years ago, a then-new foundation completing its first round of grants found itself confronting what some staff and trustees considered a moral responsibility. "One of the things we learned in that first round," recalls the foundation president, "was how much time people put into the application process." Especially because the foundation had not yet developed clear guidelines, she continued, "we had lots of questions trying to sort things out."

When the board finally reached its decisions, the board chair suggested that staff "go back and visit with everyone" to discuss the outcome. Given the time both parties had invested in this initial proposal process, "we felt we had a moral obligation" to share their thinking with the grant seekers personally.

Since then, all applicants seeking grants over $20,000 are notified of the board's decision in person. "We explain early on," the executive said, "that we are deeply engaged with our grantees and will invest time with them — as students to learn about our grantees, and as partners working together. We also explain that we do this out of respect for the time and attention they've given the process. We say that we'll come to them for the site visit, and will ask them to come to us for the notification meeting."

The sessions are scheduled in advance to fall within one week from the date of the board meeting, sometimes on the very next day. They are scheduled at 30-minute intervals, in part to preclude the tendency of some grant seekers "to want to re-plead the application."

When the board has approved a grant, the notification meeting "is a way to work on developing our relationship. It's a partnership discussion." Foundation staff explain any conditions the board may have set, clarify expectations, and get updated on the organization's work and plans. They also begin planning for an evaluation that the foundation helps grantees conduct.

Face-to-face declines have their own dynamics, which vary depending on the board's reasoning. In some, "the conversation does turn toward the future. We like the organization, but the proposal just didn't fit in the end." Foundation staff might refer the organization to other potential funders or discuss types of proposals that might be a better fit. In a few cases, the foundation offers a planning grant to refine an appealing idea that has not been adequately researched or developed.

Speaking of cases where the prospects for future grants are slim, the CEO says, "If it's clearly not our work to do, we are honest, saying there just doesn't seem to be a match between the way we work and the way you work. We actively hold our grantees accountable, and are very present with them. If we don't believe they can fulfill their goals, we tell them that."

"People come in expecting a Yes," she says. "We've learned you have to be very clear. We had a couple of people who didn't understand that we had said No." Many grantees — even when declined — respond positively to the meetings. "Some have told us they usually get a letter [from other funders] with no information. Or it says 'call if you have any questions,' and then their calls are not returned. Others have said it was actually helpful to hear the No, and the reasons, to hear how their organization is perceived."

How Your Institution Shapes Decision Giving

Since most foundations favor efficiency and civility, it's likely that virtually all of them would endorse the basic rules of good decision giving. But priorities, styles, and resources differ from one foundation to another. The challenge for the individual grant maker is to understand her own institution. Which of the basic rules of good decision giving does the foundation really embrace? Which rules does it merely aspire to — and not necessarily support with appropriate resources? And what are the unwritten rules of the foundation about decision giving? Answering these questions can help you — and those who manage the foundation — decide how to support more effective decision giving. At the very least, understanding the institution can help you *cope* with some of the pressures you face.

"How much should I educate grant seekers about my foundation's interests and priorities?"

Most grant seekers want some personal advice about whether their approach even justifies preparing a full proposal. Some foundations will value giving that advice, not just as a courtesy, but because they are likely to encounter the same grantees again and again over time. Educating them about the foundation will lead to more productive encounters in the future. Foundations that accept that logic acknowledge and encourage grant makers' interactions with grant seekers. "I spend a lot of time in an educational role," explained one grant maker at such a foundation, "telling people what the priorities are and why they're priorities and how

they work, why they're significant, what they're going to contribute."

In other foundations, grant makers will eventually discover that their institutions *don't* endorse this approach. And given the huge number of prospective grant seekers, many of whom are likely to call on the foundation only once, giving such advice could consume huge chunks of time. "I just do not have time to meet everyone who applies for a grant," said one somewhat frustrated grant maker. "When I first became a grant maker, I thought I should meet with everyone requesting a meeting. That's what I had been doing for all of my professional life. I now say No." Foundation managers might consider other techniques — pre-application conferences, "meet the foundation" sessions, on-line "office hours," more explicit guidelines, or the use of letters of inquiry — to manage the demands of the educational process when grant makers cannot handle all of them.

"What help or feedback do I owe rejected applicants, and can I afford to give it?"

Foundations that encourage a large volume of proposals *and* strive to help all applicants should consider whether grant makers' workloads will make this feasible. Many grant makers are uncertain about how much help to give. As one explained: "I try to do whatever I can to help a worthy cause, even if we don't fund them. But I think this is a weakness on my part. It takes away time, scatters my thoughts,

and compromises our foundation's limited resources." Or as another grant maker put it: "The time we spend doing turn-downs — what does that effort contribute to my foundation's success within our own mission and outcomes?"

Some foundations, however, view the helpful turn-down process as an obligation. They encourage and support it because they feel that pointing out weaknesses and suggesting sources of help is a form of capacity-building that will strengthen the field. Even at foundations that don't actively promote this norm, you can anticipate that this is part of the job, and be prepared by knowing who else funds in your field or where people can research other funders.

Foundations that don't consider giving a detailed explanation to rejected grant seekers might consider another benefit: the more often a foundation gives a clear rationale to grant seekers, the better the foundation's rationale will be understood in the community. As one grant seeker pointed out, "When they clearly explain their ideas for rejecting someone, they're putting their ideas in circulation. Grantees talk to other grantees. We'll discuss your goals and rationales." The thoughtful turn-down, in other words, can actually "be a valuable communication tool for your program."

"How can I respond promptly to all these applications?"

The principal complaint of many grant seekers — and of many foundation executives who in turn hear their complaints — is that grant makers are too slow in responding to applications. Some of the delays stem from grant maker's indecision or reluctance to deliver bad news. But some can result from more structural problems: a growing volume of applications that leave grant makers little time to give the type of personalized responses that the field aspires to.

"This is not a business in which we tend to think explicitly about client service," said one senior program officer, "but grant seekers are the public with whom we work. If we have workload problems that make it hard for [us] to deal with grant seekers, it's our responsibility as institutions to solve them." If it's your workload — and not your indecision or reluctance — that is slowing down decision giving, identifying this concern can be the starting point for taking customer service more seriously. See "A Customer Service Approach to Decision Giving" on page 15 for examples of how a foundation can support grant makers by establishing new priorities and processes within the foundation.

***"How am I supposed to handle
trustee advocacy?"***

Grant makers don't object to trustee
input on grants as much as they do
uncertainty about the ground rules.
"I wish I got more guidance on this,"
said one. Some have trouble figur-
ing out the unwritten rules of their
foundation. Is a referral from a
trustee a suggestion to look care-
fully? A trustee deferring a No to a
program officer? Or an order to
approve? Not understanding these
rules makes it difficult for the grant
maker to manage the decision-giv-
ing situation. Beyond disclaiming
any influence in the decision mak-
ing — by emphasizing to grant seek-
ers that "it's the board's decision" —
some grant makers have decoded
the unwritten rules of their
foundation by seeking guidance
from foundation executives and
peers within the foundation. With a
better sense of these dynamics, they
can then manage grant seeker
expectations more appropriately.

Mini-Case Study: A Customer Service Approach to Decision Giving

While grant seekers may not be like customers in the marketplace — in that they often lack the power of commercial customers, who can choose where and whether to do business — thinking of the grant-making process in customer-service terms can help a foundation identify ways to improve the grant seeker–grant maker relationship. Using a customer service framework, one foundation has encouraged more timely and helpful responses to grant seekers.

"We always tried to treat applicants with respect," explains the vice president for programs at a mid-size foundation, "but it's only been in the last few years that we've begun to develop and implement systems to promote the idea of customer service for our grantees."

The foundation has begun emphasizing customer service with all its staff, beginning with the development of an issue statement committing the foundation to "apply the 'golden rule' to our customer grantees, investees, and applicants: Treat them as we would like to be treated, with timely responses, courtesy, respect, and clarity." Still, as the vice president concedes, "there's not a foundation in the world that would disagree with this. The real question is: How do you translate the principles into operations?"

To start, the foundation is attempting to foster a culture of customer service, largely through careful recruiting of program officers. "We look for people willing to act this way up front," she says. "When they come for interviews, we note whether they treat our receptionist in a respectful, friendly way. This is also a big issue when we talk to their references." And founda-

tion managers occasionally accompany program officers on site visits — in part to learn about on-the-ground work in their field, but also to observe how staff members are interacting with applicants.

"The key to making people sit up and notice," however, has been the development of formal customer-service benchmarks that are linked to annual personnel reviews. For example, the foundation established targets for the length of time it takes to process proposals: five days maximum for an initial review of a letter of inquiry, to determine whether it meets the guidelines; 30 days for a substantive review and any necessary conversations with applicants to determine whether to invite a proposal; and, once a proposal is submitted, four months maximum to a final answer. Merit pay increases are determined in part on meeting these benchmarks.

The foundation is not forcing program officers to shoulder the burden of customer service alone. If some foundation process beyond a program officer's control creates a problem, changes are considered. For example, the board — which is "very supportive of the customer service approach" —

now meets every month (full meetings every quarter, with docket reviews in off months) in order to speed proposal reviews. And as it attempts to think about how to encourage "quality — real respect in interactions," the foundation is exploring a grantee and applicant survey to be administered by an independent third party. "None of this is perfect," the vice president says. "But it is a start."

Your Personal Identity vs. Professional Role

One foundation executive speculates that grant seekers would never guess what really accounts for some of the delays in decision giving. They might imagine their application grinding its way through an elaborate bureaucratic process. In reality, the proposal is more likely to be sitting on the desk of a grant maker who feels deeply ambivalent about what decision to recommend, or very reluctant to relay the decision. The problem is not institutional, it's personal. And very often, suggest some grant makers, the root of the problem is in a failure to separate personal identity and professional role.

■ *Personalizing the burden.* The professional role of grant maker is still in many ways undefined. "There really isn't a professional code of behavior," said one foundation executive. "When people come in to the job, *grant maker* is not their professional identity. They haven't thought a lot about it."

While having little sense of a professional role might seem liberating, it's more likely to be oppressive. If they don't pay attention to their professional role, grant makers will tend to see their interactions in strictly personal terms. As researcher Doug Stone suggests (see "Preparing for Difficult Conversations" on opposite page) this can lead to debilitating self-doubt: Who am I to make such a decision? Am I the type of person who wants to reject people and dash their hopes? Do I want to be the one delivering not only bad news, but explaining it in detail? Not

surprisingly, procrastination becomes a convenient way to cope with these doubts.

One grant maker described how she feels guilty when grant seekers appeal to her personally by explaining that if "the foundation says No, their work wont' be able to go forward …You get involved in a torrent of persuasion. Often I find myself getting inarticulate and abstract. I get off the phone feeling terrible." They have put the burden on her personally, when she's really functioning in a professional role.

■ *Focusing on your professional role.* The goal of focusing on professional role is not to make grant makers into grim bureaucrats who never experience uncertainty, but rather to help them get on with what their job requires: making the best decisions they can and explaining them.

"What I've discovered," said one grant maker about her own sense of professional role, "is that when I have gone through a process of developing goals for my grant making, and can be clear enough to explain them inside and outside the foundation, I find it much easier to say No — because I can describe the path that I'm on." She continues: "It doesn't mean that I'm right and the applicant is wrong. It's about making choices. But when I'm not so clear about the path, I find myself confronting my own confusion while I'm saying No — and that's *confusing* for everyone."

PREPARING FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Grant makers might feel that conducting difficult conversations is all artistry — a subtle competence gained only through long experience. In Difficult Conversations, *Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen challenge this view. They have drawn on 15 years of research at the Harvard Negotiation Project to develop a comprehensive framework for managing difficult conversations. GrantCraft asked Doug Stone — a lecturer at Harvard Law School, partner at Triad Consulting Group, and a specialist in negotiation — to explain how their research could help grant makers.*

Q. *You write in the book that all difficult conversations have "an underlying structure" and that "understanding this structure, in itself, is a powerful first step in improving how we deal with these conversations." What are the elements of this structure that grant makers should understand?*

A. Any conversation about saying No will really involve three conversations — what we call the 'what happened' conversation, the feelings conversation, and the identity conversation. We tend to focus most on the 'what happened' conversation. People often assume that figuring out who's right and who's wrong is all there is to a difficult conversation. But in this case, grant makers shouldn't see their work as being about coming up with *the* right decision — but getting to the *best* decision they can. This is not about objective truth. It's a matter of judgment. And my goal as a grant maker shouldn't be to persuade you, the grant seeker, that I'm right and you're wrong. I can simply explain to you my thinking. If you think, by analogy, to conversations when someone's breaking up, you don't need to get the other person to agree to break up. What's important is to be open, honest, caring and clear.

Q. *What's going on in the feelings conversation?*

A. First, it will help to have an awareness that people are going to have strong feelings. They care passionately about their projects, and being rejected can make them frustrated, hurt, or angry. It also helps to recognize that sometimes people will translate that sadness or hurt into something else, and sometimes what seems to be about the 'what happened' is about these feelings. You can't just assume there is no substance on their part, but it helps to understand that some substance is really feelings. And you can acknowledge and respond to feelings in a human way — 'It sounds like this is a real blow to you.' But don't try to fix their feelings. Feelings aren't broken. They're just there.

Q. *How would a grant maker's sense of her own identity come into play in a difficult conversation?*

A. We care how other people react because we're protecting our own self-image. If they're nice about being rejected, you feel, 'I'm still a good person.' If they have a negative reaction, you might feel 'I've really mishandled this in a way that proves I'm a bad person.' To care and feel bad is a good thing. But if saying No affects your sense of who you are, it becomes debilitating. So it's worth gaining self-awareness here. Ask yourself some questions: How do I feel when I turn someone down? Do I take responsibility for how a grant seeker is feeling? Do I need them to tell me it's OK so I don't have to feel bad? If you understand these issues, you can be more clear, less anxious about saying No.

Q. *This is fairly personal. Could foundation managers help grant makers understand these identity issues — short of becoming their psychotherapists?*

A. Organizations can encourage grant makers to reflect, on their own, on some simple questions: What does it mean to say No? How does that make me feel? If managers are comfortable, they can use these [questions] to start a discussion at work. But it's not necessary for people to share their responses, as long as they think these issues through. In fact, though, we've found most people tend to like talking about this. It's a relief to know you're not the only one worried about this.

Q. *A lot of your research helps people in two-way conversations where they must negotiate the outcome. But as you point out in the book, sometimes — in firing an employee or breaking up a romance — we have unilateral power. This is the situation for grant makers. What special problems does that raise?*

A. Even where you have all the power, it's still possible to have a two-way conversation. You still need to hear what's legitimate. It's not only their feelings and your sense of identity. They might say, 'You had me modify this proposal 20 times and I don't like that it's ended up this way.' If you listen to this and it's legitimate, then it's important to hear them and learn from them. If it's justified, take responsibility. Apologize and do whatever you need to do. And by listening actively enough to really learn about grant seekers' situations, grant makers might also begin to spot patterns that reveal problems with the grant process itself, or even problems in the wider nonprofit environment. With this learning, they could then be in a position to recommend changes to their foundation.

The Challenges of Saying Yes

Saying Yes should be, and usually is, a satisfying part of a grant maker's job. But even with Yes, decision giving can sometimes get complicated. Although they focused much more on the complications of saying No, commentators for this guide also pointed out some of the hazards of Yes, and offered some advice for overcoming the difficulties.

■ **The premature Yes:** Wanting to share good news, grant makers sometimes give grant seekers a Yes without indicating that a negotiating process will follow. Since the terms and scope of the grant can change significantly as negotiations unfold, giving an early, unqualified Yes can lead to grant-seeker frustration later. "They hear the Yes and not the 'let's negotiate,'" said one grant maker. "It's better to warn them early on where you think the limits are, by saying 'I like this and I'm going to recommend it. We can negotiate the details later, but you should know right now that I won't be able to fund what you requested. Here's my limit.' Then they're not blindsided down the road."

■ **"Yes, of course …"** Rather than surprise grant seekers with grant terms late in the process, sometimes grant makers don't note any terms or concerns — even when these would be helpful. They provide what one grant maker calls a "problematic unconditional love." Captivated by the proposal or the applicant, the grant maker gives blanket approval. The problem, of course, is that part of the grant-making job is to flag concerns, challenge assumptions that might be shaky, or otherwise help the grant seeker improve the proposal and, as a result, the chances for a successful project. The point is not to contrive problems where there are none, but to be sure that an unconditional Yes is also a thoughtful and helpful one.

■ **The vague Yes:** It's helpful to put in writing the expectations that grantor and grantee have agreed to during the negotiations. The written grant award will of course include the critical facts — the size, length, and terms of the grant — but any important expectation or issue the two have negotiated should be included in the letter. This often provides the last chance to detect misunderstandings that can cause trouble later or, if the two are in total agreement, to reinforce important points. So in considering the advice "write it down," the real challenge is to reflect on the *it*: Besides the boilerplate terms and conditions, what could the grant maker emphasize now that might save trouble later?

■ **"Yes, but …"** Grant makers can create trouble when they provide *too much* feedback and too many suggestions for improving a proposal that they've indicated they will recommend for funding. It can be dangerous to treat all your good ideas, helpful suggestions, or general concerns as essential parts of a proposal or a grant award. The proposal, the grant letter, or both, should of course contain conditions that are essential to your Yes — conditions without which you would not have approved the grant. But they should not con-

tain so many of the funder's ideas and restrictions that the grantee is no longer able to manage the project flexibly. "I've seen program officers put applicants through endless iterations of a proposal," said one foundation executive. "At a certain point, you have to stop and ask, 'Whose proposal is this?' You have to keep the negotiations bounded. You have to respect that the idea belongs to the grantee."

"The grant maker needs to listen deeply…and to validate grantee ideas," said another grant maker. But he also describes a balance he tries to strike between affirming grantees and yesing them: "People are not just looking for 'yeah, you're doing everything fine.' They need their ideas to be criticized, they want a genuine relationship, they want to hear." Some foundations, of course, will avoid these decision-giving dynamics by adopting an entirely responsive stance: They will simply review what they are given and respond to it. But

for those that encourage grant makers to help grant seekers refine their proposals, knowing when to *stop* helping is critical.

■ **The reluctant Yes:** Several grant makers confessed to something that many surely have done — given a Yes because giving a No is too complicated. Some, for example, found that their work with grant seekers had advanced to the point where they could see that the prospects for success looked shaky, yet they felt the time for saying No had simply elapsed. Instead of capitulating outright, the trapped grant maker awarded a small planning grant to help the grantees develop the idea further — ideally to a point at which they will have improved it significantly, or where they see for themselves that it won't work. Of course, by taking that path, grant makers run the risk that they will have to see the full proposal later, and may have succeeded only in deferring the No to an even later stage.

The Form Letter: A Grant Seeker's Critique

Often, grant makers with too many applicants and too little time make use of form letters. Even grant seekers understand that grant vetting can be a high-volume task, and that form letters are a necessary part of the job. To learn if there are more and less helpful form letters, however, we asked one grant seeker — Jorge Ruiz (a pseudonym), executive director of a youth development organization — to review some recent responses he had received and to share a grant seeker's perspective. These are the categories as he sees them:

The total brush-off.

Dear Valued Customer:
    We received your letter of request regarding sponsorship of your organization/event. Unfortunately we are not able to honor this request. The [Blank] Corp receives hundreds of sponsorship requests per month and as much as we would like to, we cannot accomodate [sic] all of them. Good luck with your event.

Undated, misspelled, sloppily photocopied, and not personalized in any way, this barest of form letters cannot help but give offense. It leaves the grant seeker wondering why he bothered to send a personalized proposal.

The universal truth...that explains nothing.

Dear Mr. Ruiz:
    I am very sorry to inform you that the board of the [Blank] Foundation did not approve your grant request. Although we would like to respond affirmatively to all requests coming to the foundation, we receive far more proposals than can possibly be funded ...

Mr. Ruiz showed us a thick handful of variations on this letter, in which the grant maker explains that there is not enough money to fund all the proposals it has received. While not insulting, and sometimes blessedly quick to arrive, these are a far cry from the standard Good Advice that urges grant makers to offer some helpful feedback or ideas on other funding sources. There was, after all, enough money to fund *some* applicants.

A form letter...or not?

Dear Mr. Ruiz:
    ... This [i.e., the fact that the foundation cannot fund all proposals] notwithstanding, the [Blank] Foundation will continue to do its best for all of America's children.
    We encourage you to continue to do likewise ...

Thanks to mail-merge, Mr. Ruiz was left wondering if this was a form letter, sent to all who were declined or if it was personalized. He puzzled over the phrase *we encourage you to continue to do likewise*, wondering if this was a veiled suggestion that his youth program does *not* serve all children. His reaction shows how, in a world where decision-making rationales are hard to figure, grant seekers will go hunting for clues.

Dear Mr. Ruiz:
    ... Unfortunately, the foundation cannot fund all of the organizations that submitted applications. We regret we are unable to provide you with a grant for general operating support. This does not reflect negatively on your organization; it is a fact of high demand on finite resources and prioritizing by our trustees ... If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us ...

Bait and switch.
Emboldened by the invitation to call, the grant seeker contacted the foundation only to learn that it "had new guidelines" under which his proposal had not been eligible for funding. The foundation was sorry that, apparently, he had "received the old guidelines."

Another letter gives a different version of how misleading or incomplete guidelines end up wasting everyone's time:

> Dear Mr. Ruiz:
>
> … The [Blank] Foundation was organized to provide support to at risk youth through academic education programs. We are sorry to advise you that the Grant Committee for the [Blank] Foundation has not selected your organization to receive a grant at this time …

In this case the foundation's interest in "academic education" programs had not been revealed anywhere in the guidelines, so learning about it in the rejection letter was a surprise.

Yet another example:

> Dear Mr. Ruiz:
>
> … We have evaluated the proposals received and the Board has determined that your proposed project does not meet with the criteria the Board was looking for. Your project, although it has great merits, is an on-going project and not a new one that could be considered primarily a [Blank] Foundation project.

Curiously, the original application form came with a cover sheet with check boxes next to "new program" or "ongoing program." Having been offered a choice, the grant seeker took this to mean that ongoing programs were also acceptable, and the foundation simply wanted to know which it was dealing with in each case. The simple phrase "only new programs will be considered" would actually have taken less space than the two check boxes, and would have been more helpful to both the foundation and the applicant.

Rationale on demand.

> Dear Mr. Ruiz:
>
> … your proposal was not approved to advance to the peer review stage. Therefore the [Blank] Foundation is declining your request for funding … If you have any questions, you may contact me at 555 555-1234.

Several rejection letters were softened by an invitation to "call if you have any questions." This is a useful compromise: Instead of detailing the rationale for every decline, these funders will discuss a rejection with those who take the trouble to call.

The letter reviewed the eight criteria used to select finalists, but applicants had to call to determine which they did not meet. By calling, the grant seeker learned exactly why his proposal was ruled out: it did not demonstrate the type of inter-organizational collaboration that the foundation was trying to encourage.

What Grant Seekers Wish Grant Makers Knew

Grant seekers who contributed to this guide suggested the same basic rules that grant makers themselves identified — though framed from their own experience — and proposed a few additional principles for good decision giving:

Put more guidance in the guidelines. Many grant seekers rely on written guidelines as their primary resource in determining whether to apply to a foundation for a grant. They therefore emphasize that guidelines should be as detailed and precise as possible. And they should be current: More than a few mentioned the problem of rapidly shifting but poorly communicated changes in guidelines. (Maintaining an up-to-date web site, with prompt notice of any changes in guidelines or procedures, is one helpful way of avoiding this pitfall.) Finally, nothing is as useful as examples. For every statement of a foundation goal, suggests one grant seeker, it would help to have an example of a current grantee whose work supports that goal. "I want to know who they are funding right now," said one grant seeker, rather than having to rely on annual reports that often feature grants made a year or more ago.

Talk to us so we can decide whether to apply. Most grant seekers are wary of developing a proposal based solely on a set of written guidelines. "My belief is that the best way to get grants is to get a relationship with people," said one grant seeker, expressing a common sentiment. "What comes out of those relationships are generative ideas. In my best experiences with program officers, we've cooked up grants together." The other additional benefit, for both grant maker and grant seeker, is the possibility of an early, definitive No if it appears there is not a match. "I'd much rather hear a No right here," said one grant seeker.

Double-check your expectations. Grant seekers are sometimes troubled to find during the proposal-development process that grant makers have unrealistic expectations. For example, one grant seeker decries funders who "don't understand that they can't make systemic change with $5,000 or $10,000 grants." Her plea: "Be willing to be a fish in the size pond you live in." Another is troubled by a common "intimidating question: Give us your plan for sustaining this program after our money ends." To this grant seeker, the answer is obvious: They'll do more fundraising. "This sometimes comes up when we're discussing a $5,000 grant," he explained. "But their own $5,000 grant is an example of our sustainability plan."

Call with a Yes. "It makes you feel good that your proposal is important enough to warrant a phone call from the grant maker," said one grant seeker. It can provide some encouragement and affirmation, as well as getting the grantor-grantee relationship off to a good start.

Give us feedback and guidance. The common refrain is summarized by a grant seeker who asks grant makers to "be straight with us." Grant seekers typically want to know if there is an obvious deficit in their program design or an apparent organizational weakness that they can address to improve their chances. They also want clear and candid guidance on whether they should reapply. "If the grant maker says, 'You are eligible to apply next year,' does that mean I *should* apply?" asks one grant seeker. "Or are my chances no better, and I'll be wasting even more time?"

Be aware of how culture affects communication. Several grant seekers observed communication problems that may arise out of cultural differences. While they don't want grant makers to make stereotypical assumptions about how to deal with different cultural groups, they do suggest that some awareness can help. "Thinking about your own communication style can be helpful." One example: A Native American woman — both a grant seeker and a grant maker — has seen how a typical due diligence conversation can undermine the confidence of grant seekers simply because of style issues. "In some cultures," she observed, "people tend to be very circumspect and are not used to direct questioning. So if a grant maker starts asking lots of questions about a proposal, people feel they're looking for reasons to say No. It helps if a grant maker can even clarify what's going on by saying, 'I'm only asking these questions because I'm really interested in your ideas. I want to know more.' "

Key Lessons From Grant Makers

Saying No

■ **Remember the basic rules.** They're obvious, they're basic, but they're often hard to live by consistently. It helps, as a starting point, to manage your decision giving by remaining focused on the four basics: (1) Articulate your goals and guidelines to discourage applications with little chance of approval. (2) Be prompt: Grant seekers are waiting and face huge uncertainty in their work. (3) Explain why you've rejected the proposal, so that grant seekers can make use of your feedback in the future. (4) Be polite — which requires not just manners but sensitivity.

■ **Understand your decision rationale.** Three different rationales produce different decision-giving dynamics. A Categorical No — where a proposal doesn't fit the basic guidelines — can be quick and concise. A Policy No — where the grant seeker's interests line up with the grant maker's but its tactics or strategies do not — requires more explanation. A Personal Judgment No — where everything fits but you still have doubts about the grant seeker — requires an even more careful and delicate set of communications. Being clear about the three Nos means the difference between managing your decision giving and muddling through it.

■ **Understand and manage grant seeker expectations.** Nos are often disappointing and disruptive to grant seekers because they were so confident of a Yes. Understand how your approach or a given grant situation might have raised expectations — both so you can better explain your reasoning and so you can help control inflated expectations.

■ **Understand how your institution shapes decision giving.** Workload, priorities, and institutional cultures can all complicate decision giving. To manage the process better, identify how your institution affects your decision giving work. It can help you cope with your challenges — and maybe even help you spark changes in some of the foundation's practices.

■ **Pay attention to your personal identity and professional role.** As for anyone in any line of work, grant makers' personal identities can be at stake in decision giving. Even the most sophisticated people are prone to feel that if they make grant seekers feel bad in rejecting them, then they are the type of person who makes other people feel bad. To avoid having that personal identity, they lapse into evasion and uncertainty. It's more helpful to be personable — but to remember your professional role, which simply includes saying No sometimes.

Saying Yes

■ **Make conditions clear right away.** Saying Yes too simply, quickly, or briefly can lead to unpleasant surprises later, when the new grantee discovers that the decision comes with unexpected conditions, negotiations, or limits.

■ **State your expectations explicitly.** Grantees like to know how the grant maker will weigh the success of a grant, and how best to demonstrate their progress in meeting the funder's expectations. Too enthusiastic or open-ended a Yes can give the impression that there are no such expectations — an impression that can lead to tensions or frustration later.

■ **Be careful when saying 'Yes, but…'** — lest you change an idea so much that the grantee no longer owns it or can no longer work effectively with it. Some give-and-take between applicant and grant maker is natural when a grant is being negotiated, but it's important to remember whose proposal it is.

■ **Beware of saying Yes just because it's too hard to say No.** In some situations, grant makers are tempted to make a grant, even just a small one, rather than to say No outright. That can be worthwhile in some circumstances, but often it just raises an applicant's hopes unrealistically. And it can involve grant makers in a relationship that their best judgment was really telling them to avoid.

OTHER WAYS TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is meant not only for grant makers, but for anyone in a grant-making organization whose responsibilities include communicating with the people who apply for funding. Grant makers may find it helpful to share this information with their legal, administrative, and executive colleagues, to make sure that all communication with applicants is consistent, clear, respectful, and useful.

Support staff are sometimes the first contact — maybe the only contact — with people who approach your organization with questions about funding. This guide may be as useful for them as for grant makers. In some organizations, legal staff or grant managers, rather than grant makers, are the ones who acknowledge proposals, prepare grant letters, and field some questions from grant seekers. They, too, will find this guide helpful in thinking about their responsibilities.

Some or all of the information in this guide can be used as part of a training curriculum for grant makers and other employees. It offers a simple compendium of basic issues in dealing with grant seekers, and it may provide background for a discussion about how to establish the right relationship between funders and those who seek support.