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FIGURES

COMMUNICATING
Enhancing Process, Participation, and the Public Face of Your Foundation

By Vincent Stehle

After considering finances, legal issues, family dynamics, and grantmaking, the last thing you might wish to consider is developing a communications strategy. For many new foundations, the preferred communications strategy can be summed up in a phrase: "The less said the better."

But there are lots of good reasons for you to publicize the work of your foundation — and its grantees. Family foundations use communications to:

- Expand the base of potential charitable partners (especially grantees), thus helping to find nonprofit organizations that are best suited to carrying out the foundation's mission;
- Inform the community and generate community support for initiatives;
- Create a supportive environment for grantees; and
- Spread the results of grantees' work to a larger audience.

The Information Age has brought awesome communications capabilities to any desk with a PC sitting on it. Family foundations now routinely use email, websites, PC-published reports, listerv distributions, and other techniques to communicate with one another, keep trustees and family up to date, and disseminate information.

Fortunately, a growing number of foundations are becoming sophisticated in media relations, publishing, and online communications. As a result, there are many well-established practices and resources to help you choose the proper communications strategy.

For some larger foundations, communications is a full-time job. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation is an operating foundation that devotes most of its resources to creating and disseminating information about health care. According to Drew Altman, president of the Kaiser Foundation, "We are in the information, not the grantmaking, business." You will most likely not want to take such an aggressive approach. But there are myriad ways to provide information and to support communications efforts of grantees that fall within the reach of even the smallest foundations.

At a minimum, you have an obligation to provide basic financial details when your foundation receives inquiries from the public, as part of the bargain of not paying taxes. Likewise, most grantmakers recognize a basic responsibility to provide information about eligibility to prospective grant applicants. But at a more strategic level, foundations are learning that they can only achieve their larger objectives if they engage in some form of communications.

Rapid improvements in information technology have greatly increased the flow of information about all types of institutions. Internet search engines, online discussion lists, and email have made it much easier for grantseekers, journalists, and others to find out about a foundation's activities. As such, it is now much harder for a foundation to operate in obscurity.

All communication begins with listening.

— ANON

Information resources available to grantseekers and others researching foundation activity have expanded exponentially in the past decade. The Foundation Center and its associated research libraries, operating throughout the country and online, provide information on nearly 60,000 foundations. And Guidestar, an online search service run by Philanthropic Research, Inc., is attempting to publish financial and program information about all charities and foundations.

The two key concepts that drive much of the scrutiny of foundations today are accountability and transparency. And both of these concepts are amplified with greater access to information. As part of the more skeptical ethos ushered in by the national tragedies of Watergate and the war in Vietnam, public institutions of all types are held to a higher standard of accountability than they were before. Public officials and institutions now have to continually earn the trust of a questioning public, and foundations are no exception.

Transparency is a related concern, more commonly discussed in the conduct of business affairs. Transparency means that an enterprise conducts its affairs in a way that makes decision processes and financial transactions open to scrutiny, as a way to prevent corruption and to ensure the most effective use of resources. Foundations have greater flexibility and latitude than government agencies in determining how they spend their money. But there is no way to escape the sense that an increasingly curious public wants to know how and why foundations spend their resources the way they do.

fig. 1

Ideas on Communications for the New or Small Family Foundation

- Consider how communications can facilitate your own internal operations, such as communication among trustees via email, a "family" page on a website (probably by password), and communications with contractors and advisors.
- Look at ways to get out the important messages to be found in your Mission Statement and grant guidelines: issue an announcement, a press release, or a brochure; go on community television; create a listserv for grantees.
- Develop an annual reporting mechanism that complements your Form 990-PF and is right for your family foundation style. For example, you can send a photocopy of the annual report to those you hope to involve or to those who request information. A photocopy saves time and money.
- Talk with other founders and trustees in your community who share funding interests, and ask for ideas on how to get the word out.
- If you do not accept unsolicited proposals, say so. Many family foundations begin by funding organizations they know, while researching new ones.
- Think about how communications can help your grantees and add "bang to your grant dollars." Draft procedures for and standard language on how nonprofit organizations can and cannot use your foundation name in their communications.
- Develop a strategy for responding to press inquiries before it's an issue.
- Consider the advantage of a communications advisor as an ad hoc or retained consultant or firm. Such a professional can help you during the startup phase and be available later, as needed.

This chapter explores communications from two perspectives, first looking inward at family matters and then looking outward to the community and the world.

The chapter addresses five subjects:

- Thinking about privacy and the family;
- Developing a communications strategy;
- Learning about communications basics;
- Finding communications resources; and
- Communications can support the mission.

Thinking About Privacy and the Family

At the outset, it's important to acknowledge the common urge to operate anonymously. There are several good reasons why donors might seek to operate foundations in anonymity. But whatever the impulse, giving anonymously is not really an option when a donor decides to establish a foundation under United States tax law. By virtue of the tax benefits extended by the government, foundations have an obligation to operate for public purposes and to make regular reports to the public. Private foundations have long been required to provide information about their operations, especially since 1969, when a major overhaul of tax laws greatly increased formal scrutiny of foundation affairs.

fig. 2 **No Cloak of Secrecy: Anonymous Giving**

Look at any list of donors and you are sure to find a familiar name: anonymous. Throughout the ages, anonymous giving has been greatly admired and deeply rooted in the practice of philanthropy. Maimonides, the 12th Century Jewish philosopher, is the most commonly cited among many influential thinkers who have argued that giving is most virtuous when it is done privately and selflessly. Even today, many donors want to keep their good works quiet out of modesty and humility,

There are also selfish — but no less compelling — reasons to conduct philanthropy anonymously. Some donors feel that public displays of philanthropy can bring unwanted attention to their wealth, thereby leaving family members vulnerable to threats to their personal security.

Some donors may even entertain the romantic notion of being a latter-day John Beresford Tipton, the unseen force in the old television program, "The Millionaire." Each week, Tipton's assistant, would deliver a tax-free check for $1 million to an unsuspecting beneficiary. (Perhaps less well-remembered are the distressing consequences of Tipton's essentially manipulative style of giving.)

On a more mundane level, some people believe that providing too much information about a foundation's operations can lead to a flood of unsolicited proposals. By operating in secrecy, some donors feel that they can maintain better control of their giving, devoting themselves more fully to thinking about who to support and less to the task of turning everybody else down.

Whatever your reason, if you want to carry out your philanthropy in total anonymity, using a foundation is not the way to do it. In the first place, it's not legally possible, given the public reporting requirements of the federal government. But even more importantly, foundations function more effectively when they operate with some degree of public accountability.

Limiting Public Knowledge and Access

Many founders and their families are concerned about the effect of publicity on the family. They may have heard about grantseekers buttonholing them in public places. They may have read stories suggesting that persons of wealth may face threats to their personal security.

In fact, with one exception, the founder and the foundation can achieve a high degree of anonymity. Aside from the Form 990-PF, you can keep your family and foundation activities very private. You do not have to list the foundation in the telephone book, maintain an office available to the public, print foundation letterhead or business cards, issue printed or electronic grant guidelines, publicize your grants, or accept offers from well-meaning nonprofit organizations that want to honor you and the foundation with a bronze plaque. Your lawyer can write the grant checks.

One foundation that follows a limited public knowledge approach is the Jerry Taylor & Nancy Bryant Foundation in

Washington, DC, which maintains a low profile, mostly out of a sense of family style. Because the foundation does not accept unsolicited grant proposals, it does not issue grant guidelines; it has no website, publishes no annual report, and does not alert the media to grants. "We have kept our foundation as simple as we possibly can," Nancy Bryant says. "Basically, I'm the staff person. I don't want to be inundated with the workload, if we accepted unsolicited grants. I keep a statement of guidelines that I send to charities that interest us."

She adds: "We state in our form 990-PF that we do not accept unsolicited grant proposals. The nonprofit community pretty much honors that position. We receive maybe one or two such proposals a year. If we do receive an unsolicited letter of inquiry, I send a form letter stating that we are limited to a defined geographical area, focus only on specific issues, or are limited in resources and cannot make a grant at this time."

GOOD ADVICE ➢ Access to information in some families is unequal. Young people and especially women don't always have equal access to financial and other types of information. Therefore, they are often unempowered. It's important for information related to the foundation to flow freely to all family members.

ALISON GOLDBERG, BOARD MEMBER AND DAUGHTER OF THE FOUNDER,
ROBERT P. & JUDITH N. GOLDBERG FOUNDATION

fig. 3 **Foundations Can Define and Redefine**

In a rapidly changing society, one of the most valuable processes is taking a new or another look at issues that have long been, shortly will [be], or should be on the public agenda. There is too often a lag in public perception and recognition; foundations can play an effective part in defining and redefining those issues through research, analyses, conferences, seminars, publicity, or simply reporting their own considerations and grant results.

PAUL YLVISAKER

"Small Can Be Effective," in *Conscience & Community: The Legacy of Paul Ylvisaker.* Virginia M. Esposito, Ed. New York: Peter Lang, 1999, p. 364. (First published as an occasional paper for the Council on Foundations, April 1989.)

Developing a Communications Strategy

Communications occupies such a large part of American life that you may find it advantageous to develop a communications strategy for the foundation.

There are many reasons for you to view communications in a positive light. It's not just an obligation or an unavoidable annoyance. Communications is an opportunity, and in some ways, it is essential for a foundation to communicate to achieve its full potential.

For all of these reasons, and more, if you are thinking of setting up a foundation today, consider how you intend to communicate its activities.

There is a growing consensus among foundations that communications efforts are central to the work of philanthropy. It is a realization that foundations are much more than merely financial conduits that dispense money to worthy causes. In many ways, foundations are information institutions, gathering and dispensing knowledge along with financial support. And if they don't convey that knowledge to a wider audience, it is a largely wasted effort.

In an influential *Harvard Business Review* article, Michael Porter and Mark Kramer argue that foundations can only justify their existence if they do more than merely transfer money. Foundations create value in four ways, according to Kramer and Porter, founders of the Center for Effective Philanthropy. In order of increasing impact, foundations add value beyond their financial contributions by:

- Selecting the best grantees. Like investment advisers, foundations channel resources to their most productive use by studying a range of organizations and selecting the groups that are most effective.
- Signaling other funders. Foundations can attract additional resources from other funders who follow their lead, when they can show that their grantees are especially effective.
- Improving the performance of grant recipients. Grantmakers greatly increase their impact when they offer more than financial support, providing management assistance, advice, and access to networks of funders and other peers.
- Advancing the state of knowledge and practice. Foundations produce the greatest value to society when they promote research and support projects that seek to produce increasingly effective responses to social problems.

The common thread in each of these approaches is that each of them requires foundations to communicate what they are doing to a broader audience, whether that means potential grantees, others working in a particular field, policymakers, or members of the general public.

Foundations communicate in many ways and for many reasons, but they can be boiled down to three basic categories of activity:

- Efforts to publicize their own work and the work of their grantees. Foundations routinely publish annual reports and press releases, commission research papers, and communicate with reporters and editors about grants and other foundation activities.
- Support for communications projects of grant recipients. Foundations frequently pay for the publishing, media relations, and advocacy activities of nonprofits, in many cases as part of grant support.
- Efforts to sustain and create nonprofit media programs. Backing groups like public television, public radio, and a range of other nonprofit media projects, a small group of foundations supports the infrastructure over which most public interest programs are carried.

For most donors thinking about setting up a new foundation, developing an effective advocacy campaign may be a low priority. It is one thing for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation or the Pew Charitable Trusts, each of which employs dozens of communications workers, to be concerned with such a campaign. It is quite another for a small, startup family foundation to do so. Traditionally, new foundations have focused on supporting direct services at the local level. But now, even a small foundation with few or no staff members, can engage in a sophisticated communications strategy intended to shape popular opinion and public policy.

As you bring your foundation into being, choosing a communications strategy can be one of the most important decisions you will make. How or whether you will publicize the activities of the foundation and its grantees will

fig. 4 **Sending the Message via Television Programs**

The Mayday Fund, which focuses on how pain is understood and treated, works with W.E. Duke & Co. to advance the message that pain should be addressed in Hollywood. In this project, screenwriters are educated about pain and its care in the hopes that the message will become part of programs, including dramas and soap operas.

fig. 5

Possible Elements of a Communications Strategy

Assume that a family foundation's mission can be advanced by connecting with key audiences throughout the community. The foundation's strategy might contain these steps and elements:

YEAR 1

- Establish goals for a communications strategy, and ensure that goals further the foundation mission;
- Select critical portions of the Mission Statement as the focus for messages to be offered to the community and key audiences;
- Identify key audiences, such as community leaders, local government officials, our sector of local nonprofits, and the public;
- Explore, with professional media advisors, optional approaches, such as sending messages via grantees, donor groups, etc.;
- Determine methods (neighborhood meetings, focus groups, etc.) of finding out about community feelings, values, opinions, historical problems, etc., and select methods that generate a constant stream of information from the community;
- Establish a procedure for making the Form 990-PF public and available;
- Talk with current and potential grantees about publicity: who will handle it, how the foundation's name and interests can be protected, what the goals are, etc.;
- Examine and cost out optional methods of reaching key audiences, such as convening meetings, direct mail, newspaper and radio/TV ads; and
- Create pilot communications products and develop capability to deal with the news media.

YEAR 2

- Arrive at longer term agreement with a communications firm;
- Narrow focus of the messages and select modest elements of the communications strategy for implementation;
- With grantees leading the effort, launch the strategy with a low-key briefing of local media;
- Follow up with meetings with key community leaders, government officials, key editors and reporters, potential collaborators in funding, etc.
- Open website for posting of the Form 990-PF, Mission Statement, Grant Guidelines, and other important information; and
- Publish the First Annual Report and distribute to key audiences.

YEAR 3

- Publish the Second Annual Report and distribute to key audiences;
- Form advisory group of grantees to advise the foundation on its communications strategy; and
- Appoint a qualified family member or hire an outside professional part-time to handle communications.

help to shape the way it is regarded — by the general public, news media, and governmental officials.

A Strategy Can Grow Over Time

The Helen Bader Foundation in Milwaukee is a family foundation started by the family of Helen Bader a few years after her death in 1989. The foundation started with no communications staff member. In the first year, the foundation trustees retained a small Milwaukee public relations firm to help advise them on how to inform the nonprofit world of the existence of the foundation. "We knew we wanted to do great things, but we also knew we could not do great things without great grant applicants," says Daniel Bader, now president of the foundation.

Early on, the foundation cultivated contacts in the media, setting up one-on-one meetings with local reporters who covered education, for example, to

fig. 6 Marco Polo Inquiry Group: A New Approach to Communications

In October 2000, a group of 14 funders got together to discuss how their foundations might be transformed by the digital age and other external forces. Group members represented foundations of all sizes, mostly from the California area. Identifying themselves as the Marco Polo Inquiry Group, each committed to working within their foundations — and among other foundations — to communicate and share new ways to optimize assets, networks, knowledge, and expertise and to participate fully in their communities' most critical problems in more powerful ways. Although the work of this group is far from complete, it has begun developing an indepth communications framework that emulates lessons of the famous explorer, Marco Polo. The following seven-issue framework developed by the group — essentially a creed — lays out a full range of strategies that foundations can choose to apply as they work to achieve their missions:

- **A larger ecosystem.** In our foundations, whatever the size or focus, we need to make our walls more permeable: to become more connected to the world and the other players around us, more attuned to what others expect of us, and to where we add value to a larger purpose. We need to become better consumers of ideas and experience from other players and sectors and more skilled at designing joint responses to shared needs.
- **Cultural adaptability.** The wired world is changing the fundamental nature of our political, organizational, and social life. It sets up high expectations for open access, transparency, rich and "storied" data, knowledge sharing, and rapid response time; it flattens hierarchies, calls boundaries into question in both positive and negative ways, and makes "linking to learn" and "learning by doing" the order of the day. Most of our foundations are ill equipped culturally to operate in this world.
- **Customer satisfaction.** We find the idea that foundations "don't have customers" (or don't operate in a marketplace, or don't have anything analogous to bottom-line accountability) to be misleading and shortsighted. For us to be the organizations we want to be, performance matters. The measure of performance is not just the evaluated outcomes of our grants. It's also the value our customers—be they donors, grantees, elected officials, or program partners—experience from our work.
- **Knowledge.** We need to get better at learning from and with others, at recognizing grantees as the source of much of "our" knowledge, at enabling others as knowledge creators, at turning grant output into usable knowledge for others, and at determining what skills, systems, and cultures inside foundations best support this knowledge work.
- **Communications as leadership.** The drive for change in foundations comes most directly to the leaders at the top. It demands of us a different set of skills and priorities than we have traditionally been asked for. It compels us to value and practice communications as a leadership skil l— for its full power to help build cultures of teamwork, learning, innovation, and responsiveness inside the foundation, and to put the full weight of our foundations behind the work of building constituencies for equity and change outside our foundations.
- **Cross-foundation work.** Creating a culture of shared work and shared learning across foundations is profoundly important. Echoing the "silos" that exist within many of our foundations, we have developed as institutions our lone capabilities and identities. There is much we can learn for each other. There is much redundancy — deriving from our instinct to "invent it here" — to eliminate. And there is much potential in thinking of our different organizations as composing a system of problem solving.
- **Expanded accountability.** In distilling the themes above, we hold ourselves to a new definition of accountability. This new "high standard" of accountability is based on the conviction that unknown, isolated, and perceived-to-be-inflexible organizations will become less and less able to create value in our networked society — thus generating lower return on exempt assets and ultimately becoming less accountable in the context of public benefit.

SOURCE: Marcia Sharp, "Grantmakers in a New Landscape," *Foundation News & Commentary*, 43:2, March/April 2002. Members of this group include: Blueprint Research & Design, Inc., Irvine Foundation, Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, Sobrato Family Foundation, Los Angeles Urban Funders, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Omidyar Foundation, Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Dean and Margaret Lesher Foundation, California Community Foundation, Durfee Foundation, Humboldt Area Foundation, California Community Foundation, University of Southern California, Millennium Communications Group, Inc., Peninsula Community Foundation, Northern California Grantmakers, and Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

explain what the foundation intended to do and how the nonprofit community might be involved in those plans. Within about a year and a half after startup, the foundation added a printed annual report to its communications repertoire. "The purpose was to keep the community posted on what had been accomplished, any changes in direction, and other matters of interest to grantseekers," Bader says. "The annual reports became increasingly reader-friendly, attractive, and informative."

As the foundation grew, the trustees decided to hire a communications staff member to oversee these activities. Press conferences and other events attended the launching of initiatives: photo ops with a grantee, for example, or a sit-down between a foundation program person and a particular reporter to explain the grant.

The core of the communications director's job is to prepare the annual report, oversee internal communications (keeping the board informed, for example), scheduling onsite visits, and so on. The foundation launched its website in 1997; Daniel Bader is highly proficient in communications technology and wanted capability to serve users in the foundation's statewide Alzheimer's program, in its rural outreach programs, and in its overseas work in Israel. A website is a natural tool for these uses. "At the beginning, the website was essentially a mirror image of our annual report," says Bader. "We updated it maybe twice a year. Lately, we've gotten a lot more newsworthy, looking for profiles of interesting people and activities in the programs throughout the year. Also, we want to get information out there as events occur — great projects that the foundation has been involved with, recent grants, and other matters that offer a good way to keep the community informed more frequently."

The foundation maintains a clear set of guidelines on its website. Although the website is basically a public information tool, it also enables grantseekers to apply on line (fully 25 percent of proposals come in online).

Learning About Communications Basics

Knowledge of the basic tools of foundation communications will be useful to you. You may wish to employ some all, or none of them, but this primer will provide a basic menu from which to choose.

Understanding the IRS Form 990-PF

For starters, every private foundation must fill out and file a federal informational tax return, Form 990-PF. Not only must you file the form with the federal government, but you must also make it available to members of the public upon request. Foundations have long had to file 990 forms, but recently the federal government has tightened its rules requiring foundations to make their reports more readily available to the public.

Moreover, Guidestar, a free online information service, posts copies of all foundation 990 forms to its site. (Guidestar also carries news from the Internal Revenue Service and other sources about developments on Form 990-PF,

fig. 7 Making Your Form 990-PF Public and Available

- Must file with the IRS by the 15th of the 5th month after the close of the foundation's fiscal year;
- Must make copies of the form available for public inspection; and
- Must provide copies of forms for the past three years to anyone who asks for them (if the foundation makes the form widely available, as on its website, it need not respond to individual inquiries for copies).

such as electronic filing of the form.) Altogether, the increasing awareness of the availability of your Form 990 means that your financial information will be made widely available to the public. Unfortunately, many charities and foundations have been careless in preparing their tax returns. According to the National Center on Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute, more than half of all 990 forms are filled out incorrectly. But now, with wider access being made possible through technology, such mistakes are more consequential. At a minimum, you should carefully and accurately fill out your 990 form.

fig. 8

An Innovative Approach

The Boone Foundation of San Marino, California, is a small family foundation that shares information about its work in a particularly innovative way. Trustee George Boone enjoys photography as a hobby and has made several videos about the foundation and its work. One, entitled "Grantmaking with a Passion," shows the work of several foundation grantees. Boone says that he videotapes whenever he sees the need to get out more information about a particular program. He believes that the videos are effective communications tools. "When someone asks, 'What does your foundation do?'" Boone says, "I hand them a brochure about the foundation and offer them a video."

SOURCE: Newell Flather, Mary Phillips, and Jean Whitney, *Governance*. Family Foundation Library, Virginia M. Esposito, ed. Washington, DC: Council on Foundations, 1997, p. 97.

Given that your financial information is going to be made public to a wide audience, you may want to inform the public about your foundation by using one or more of the following simple methods. (After all, the Form 990-PF in an imperfect communications vehicle; Curtis W. Meadows, Jr., president emeritus of The Meadows Foundation and a lawyer, notes that the Form 990-PF was designed by the IRS for tax purposes, not as a communications vehicle.)

Publishing an Annual Report

Although not required by law, annual reports are considered by many foundations to be the most complete and straightforward way to handle a range of communications needs. Annual reports can include introductory essays by governing board members, usually the chairman, or by staff members, if there are any. They can also include detailed descriptions of each of the grants made during the year under review. They generally include a basic financial statement, accounting for assets and liabilities, grant payments and administrative expenses and other financial activity. And they generally include grant guidelines.

According to the Foundation Center, more than 75 percent of foundations with assets of more than $100 million published annual reports or other publications that described their giving. On the other hand, fewer than 5 per cent of foundations with assets less than $5 million published such reports. Overall, fewer than one in five foundations of all sizes publish annual reports or other materials.

Family foundation annual reports reflect the full range of options. Some family foundations publish no annual report at all. Others issue a photocopy of a statement from the founder or the trustees. Many publish a simple pocket-sized brochure, while still others publish a full-color illustrated report that rivals the best of the Fortune 500 corporate annual reports. Quite a few offer a videotape. The content, design, and printing quality of the annual report reflect the tastes and values of the family foundation that issues it.

An example of a family foundation annual report is that of The Carpenter Foundation in Medford, Oregon. The foundation issues a 2-color, 10-panel brochure. One panel carries a four-paragraph President's Report, a one-paragraph Purpose Statement, and a *fig.* 9

Contents of an Annual Report

The contents of your annual report are entirely up to you: no law or regulation requires you to file one. Annual reports typically contain:

- Name and location of the foundation, names of officers and trustees, and name of contact person and ways to reach him or her (telephone, mailing address, and email address);
- History of the foundation and biographical material about the founder;
- Mission Statement and a report of the past year on grantmaking activities undertaken to carry out the mission (grantees and grant amounts are often given);
- Vignettes or longer stories about grantee activities;
- Grant application guidelines, application submission procedures, and grantmaking decision cycles by the trustees;
- Financial statements for the past year; and
- An outlook section looking toward the year to come.

two-paragraph History. Financial Statements and a list of Trustees occupy another panel. Five panels list recent grants, one panel presents grant guidelines, and two panels are given to the front and back covers.

A similar but unique approach is that of the Dr. G. Clifford and Florence B. Decker Foundation, a family foundation located in Binghamton, New York. The 2001 annual report is a 10-panel, 1-color brochure that devotes fully 5 panels to a list of grants, carries financial information (assets, grant payments, and grants approved), presents grant application procedures, and contains a thoughtful mini-essay by Board Chair Ferris G. Akel on the year 2001 in review.

Large, national family foundations publish annual reports that are 50 to 100 pages long, are printed in color with photography, and carry in-depth stories about grantees and grantmaking activities. Some become noteworthy for excellence in editorial content. The annual essays by Margaret E. Mahoney, for many years president of The Commonwealth Fund, are still referred to in thoughtful discussions of important issues in family philanthropy. (Excerpts from her essay on trusteeships are included in the Governance chapter, p. 85.)

Publishing Grant Guidelines

Although many foundations publish their grant guidelines in their annual report, many foundations also publish, on paper and online, grant guidelines for wide distribution to potential grant applicants. You might worry that your foundation will be overwhelmed by proposals, but it's a rare complaint that a foundation has received too many good proposals. In any event, broadly publicizing what a foundation will support or its geographic restrictions also helps to limit the number of applications, by showing clearly what will fall outside a foundation's purposes. Of course, it is always possible not to issue guidelines and to state that a foundation does not accept unsolicited proposals.

Grantmaking guidelines assist both your foundation and those who are engaged in the grantseeking process by spreading the word on foundation mission, streamlining the application for foundation administrators, and helping grantseekers present themselves and their needs clearly and completely, without wasting their or their prospective funder's time. At a minimum, published guidelines provide a brief history of the foundation and its mission; detail the nature and size of grants and any restrictions; specify requirements for submitting proposals; describe the selection process; and set out policies regarding first-time grants, renewals, site visits, or contact with trustees. Formats for guidelines vary from simple foldout brochures to lengthier booklets, to electronic formats provided on the foundation website. (See Sample Policies and Forms, p. 228.)

GOOD ADVICE➢ For the Gordon–Lovejoy Foundation, established in 1998 by Nicholas Gordon and Barbara Lovejoy, a simple website announces the small handful of grants to nonprofit organizations involved in promoting environmentally sustainable practices. With some justification, many small foundations are leery of the Internet, in fear that it will provoke a flood of unwanted solicitations. But the Gordon-Lovejoy Foundation offered a straightforward solution: "We kindly request that you do not send proposals and limit your correspondence to three pages."

fig. 10 A Classic Set of Communications Tools

The Mayday Fund employs a set of communication tools to help it fulfill its charitable mission, which is "the alleviation of the incidence, degree, and consequence of human physical pain." Its tools include:

- Extensive use of electronic mail between trustees and staff members as well as with grant applicants and grantees;
- Posting of the foundation's mission statement, grant guidelines, and lists of grants made on the website of a grantee, for example, The Mayday Pain Project, which is located at www.painandhealth.org;
- Retention of a small communications firm, Burness Communications, to advise on communications generally, conduct appropriate research, and help develop effective tools for working with the public; and
- Use of the communications firm to plan public events, such as press conferences, which draw attention to Mayday's activities

Considering Named Gift Opportunities

You may wish to make a substantial gift to a cultural or educational organization or a hospital or clinic, or virtually any other large capital project, and permit the organization to acknowledge your generosity by naming a part of the project for you or someone you would like to honor. Most donors may think that they are the principal beneficiaries of such a memorial. But fundraisers will quickly point out that the institution also benefits, because a donor's public involvement often spurs others to join the effort.

In 1998, for example, Columbia University christened the Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health in honor of the late industrialist on the occasion of a gift of $33 million from the Mailman Foundation, a family foundation. Phyllis Mailman said the gift was intended to reflect her late-husband's approach to philanthropy during his lifetime, in which he often urged other people to give. "The family's hope is that the gift may encourage other small family foundations to consider making such transforming gifts to really make a difference, to think about the possibilities of how they can make a statement. And to stop being shy about it. The time is now," she said.

Issuing Press Releases

A press release is a simple statement that informs members of the press and others about an upcoming or recent event or activity. You may wish to issue press releases concerning grants by your foundation. But it is more common for the recipient organization to draft a press release describing the project and acknowledging supporters as part of the statement. It can be useful for you to establish a policy about press releases, determine whether you want to participate or not, and decide who will handle calls and provide information for the beneficiaries when they want to create a release.

Basic Contents of a Press Release

- Date of release, when the media can publish the information;
- Name and telephone number of person for further contact and information;
- Headline that presents the key message;
- Lead paragraph that states the top news element: the What:
  - Where and When, if an event is being announced;
  - Who, if the news is about a person;
- Second paragraph that presents the Why and the How;
- Third paragraph with further details;
- Fourth paragraph with a quotation from the founder, a trustee, or other person in authority;
- Additional details;
- No longer than 400 words.

fig. 11 Press Release Announces Named Gift (Excerpt)

FOR RELEASE ON
October 29, 2001

Contact: Robert Tobon
414/224-6470, ext. 115

HELEN BADER FOUNDATION, IN LARGEST GRANT TO DATE,
Awards $5 Million for UW-Milwaukee's Focus on Aging

(Milwaukee) – The Helen Bader Foundation has awarded a five-year, $5 million grant to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Social Welfare, the largest grant in the Foundation's 10-year history and the largest grant ever received by a UWM school. In recognition of this gift, and of the Foundation's support of UWM over the past 10 years, UWM has renamed the School of Social Welfare in honor of the late Helen Bader, a 1981 graduate of the School.

The $5 million grant establishes an endowed chair in gerontology within the School of Social Welfare and the Helen Bader Scholarship Fund to assist UWM students throughout the university in preparing for careers in gerontology and age-related studies.

"In the next few years, there will be an urgent need to address the many day-to-day aspects of growing older," said Daniel Bader, son of Helen Bader and president of the Foundation. "UWM has a long track record of working with the community in developing fresh, creative approaches to aging. I know that my mother would be pleased that UWM will continue her passion for helping older adults live better lives."

Helen Bader earned her Masters in Social Work at age 53, after she and her former husband, Alfred, built the Aldrich Chemical Company. After graduation from UWM, she began working with residents at the Milwaukee Jewish Home and Care Center, where many older adults were living with Alzheimer's disease. She used music and dance to reach residents, and she worked at the Center until her death in 1989….

fig. 12

Sample Press Release (Excerpt)

FOR RELEASE ON
March 5, 2002

Contact: Robert Tobon
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PRISON VISITS HELP CHILDREN RECONNECT WITH JAILED MOMS
Helen Bader Foundation Awards $10,000 Grant to St. Rose Residence

(Milwaukee) – Women comprise just 12 percent of Wisconsin's prison population, yet their incarceration is more likely to create upheaval in their children's lives than for male inmates. In most cases, their children are sent to live with relatives or a foster family, an adjustment complicated by feelings of fear, anger, and self-doubt.

Since 2000, St. Rose Youth & Family Center Inc.'s Family Reunification Program has helped Milwaukee County children better understand the various issues that arise after their mothers are jailed. The Helen Bader Foundation, Inc. recently awarded a $10,000 grant to help the agency continue the program, the only one of its type in the county.

"In-person visits are the primary way of maintaining relationships," said Kenneth Czaplewski, St. Rose president. "Phone calls from prison have to be made collect, so the cost is prohibitively expensive for most families."

Through the program, the child and counselor travel together one Saturday each month to one of the state's far-flung prisons. The counselors prepare the children for what to expect during the visit, which is not held behind glass, but face-to-face. According to counselors in the program, visits tend to revolve around a shared activity or talking about everyday concerns….

Retaining a Communications Professional

However ambitious your communications plans, it is likely that you will not immediately hire a staff member specifically to carry out communications activities. You may assign a board member or a staff member to be the principal official handling these matters, but you may also wish to hire a communications consultant to help out. There are many public relations and communications consultants who can help you on an ad hoc basis, either to prepare an annual report or to generate press releases or any other communications task.

Examples of Press Releases on Websites

Glazier Family Foundation – Florida
www.glazerfamilyfoundation.com/latestnews.asp

Sobrato Family Foundation – California
sobrato.com/foundation/press.htm

The Spencer Foundation – Chicago, IL
www.spencer.org/index.htm

Waitt Family Foundation – California
www.waittfoundation.org/News/press_powerup.asp

Blandin Foundation – Minnesota
www.blandinfoundation.org/releases/New%20Senior%20Program%20Director%20Hired.Joselyn.February.2001.htm

George Gund Foundation – Ohio
www.gundfdn.org/news_f.html

Precisely what value does a communications firm bring to a family foundation, however, in addition to skills and experience that no family member may possess? The Mayday Fund responds that it works through teams that advise its trustees. The small communications firm ensures that the teams will be well informed about the mission of the foundation and alert to concerns of the trustees. "By having professional teams, the Fund is trying to send a message that the issues are serious and that they deserve expert attention," Executive Director Christina M.

fig. 13

How a Press Release Can Further Your Foundation's Mission

A well-prepared press release can be of value in promoting the work of your foundation whether the release is prepared by you, a foundation trustee or staff member, a grantee, or another known, respected organization. For instance, a recent announcement that the Minneapolis-based McKnight Foundation, a family foundation, received the Council on Foundation's new Paul Ylvisaker Award was prepared by the Council, and provides substantial information about McKnight's efforts in support of welfare-to-work requirements. The release was posted to McKnight's website (www.mcknight.org) and has been widely distributed within the philanthropic community.

fig. 14

Three Key Questions About Using a Communications Firm

The Mayday Fund has retained communications firms with considerable success. Through Executive Director Christina M. Spellman, the trustees gave these responses to three critical questions:

Why did Mayday hire a communications firm?
One of Mayday's goals is public education. The trustees agreed that a most effective way to educate the public was to have a well-coordinated communications strategy. The executive director at that time had followed the work of Burness Communications over the years and had been impressed by how persistent, innovative, and skillful the firm was. Also, as Mayday only has one staff person, working with a communications firm was equivalent to having a communications branch. The same strategy holds for our Hollywood Project.

How does it use the firm?
Mayday uses the communications firms it works with to help develop an issue, to design a creative and effective strategy, and to help to evaluate the success of communications projects as well as other types of grantmaking. When the executive director has a question about a grant request, she often asks for an opinion from Burness Communications if the project involves media or the public. In some ways, they function as a form of peer review.

What advice can Mayday give to new foundation founders on using a firm during the startup era?
A communications firm helps you to define who you are as part of the process of framing the messages that you wish to create. A firm also shares the best methods (and common practices) to achieve the goals. Part of this function is that communications advisors help the foundation founders to articulate what they hope to achieve while sharing realism about how to do it.

Spellman comments. "Finally, for a small staff, having communications advisors increases and enhances the ability to reach larger audiences."

Mayday uses the communications firm for specific purposes, not as a bin for routine mail. Day-to-day requests for information are handled in several ways: The foundation's director reviews all requests, responds to some directly, refers some to the communications firm, and sends some to a specific grantee or a known authority on the topic. Responses to mail are seen as an important information activity.

Communicating Online

In the past few years, the Internet has become a powerful and ubiquitous force in American society. In philanthropy, it has changed many things, including the way charities raise funds. The Internet can be an efficient and effective tool for even the smallest foundation, to publish whatever information it wants to make public. You may want to provide information online, in addition to that contained in your 990-PF, just to make sure you are shaping how people view the work of your foundation.

Many family foundations today use email extensively to communicate among family members; quite a few family foundations maintain limited-access websites or listservs that only family members or designated others can access for information about board

fig. 15 Example of a Classic Website Homepage

WAITT FOUNDATION HOMEPAGE

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meetings, discussions of grant applicants, and other inside-foundation and family business. (Some family foundations still distribute a printed newsletter about family and foundation history, current grants, board activities, and the like — preferring print over electronics.)

Finding Communications Resources

The main reason most foundations don't publish information about their activities is they just don't have the time or extra hands to handle the work. But this reason may be less valid today than it was in times past. There are now many resources available that should make it much easier for small foundations, including those run completely on a voluntary basis, to provide basic information to the public.

Desktop and online publishing gives anyone with a personal computer the capability to publish information, without becoming involved in the long and laborious process of creating drafts and contracting with printers and distributors to publish information. In fact, if you decide to establish a website, you can easily post information about your foundation's activities without ever putting pen to paper. Beyond advances in information technology, many resources are available for every foundation that seeks to launch communications activities. The first stop for guidance is the Communications Network, a Washington, DC-based affinity group (an organization of foundations with similar interests), whose express purpose is to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of communications in philanthropy;
- Expand and enhance the fields' communications capacities; and
- Provide resources to foundations and their grantees to help them make the most of that capacity.

The Communications Network carries out its goals by publishing guides, conducting workshops, and offering technical assistance and a wide range of other services, mainly for foundation trustees and staff. You can learn more about this affinity group by calling their offices at 202.887.4818, or visiting their website at www.comnetwork.org.

A comprehensive general guide to foundation communications, the *Grantmakers Communications Manual*, is published by the Council on Foundations and the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers. The manual offers guidance in devising communications plans, by helping to determine who the audience is and how to develop messages tailored to that audience. The manual details means for engaging board members and other volunteers, along with full-time staff and consultants, and gives detailed guidance on setting hourly pay rates for communications consultants. Although the full range of communications issues is discussed, the manual focuses mainly on media relations.

Much basic information exists on how to use communications tools. The Benton Foundation's website subject category, "Strategic Communications in the Digital Age: A best practices toolkit for achieving your organization's mission," is an excellent overview resource. This website features a broad range of resources, produced by Benton in cooperation with other nonprofit communications experts. It serves as a forum for foundations and nonprofit organizations that want to ask questions and share success stories, offers tips on designing and implementing media strategies and other communications plans, and carries outside reports concerning communications and information technology for nonprofit organizations. The Benton website address is www.benton.org.

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fig. 16 Communications and Public Advocacy

If you want to help nonprofits shape public policy, providing support for advocacy communications can be a crucial element of success. According to "Now Hear This," a brochure published by Fenton Communications, there are three essential characteristics for an effective advocacy campaign. It must have:

- Clear, measurable goals;
- Extensive knowledge of whom you are trying to reach and what moves them; and
- Compelling messages that connect with your target audience.

For more information on laws and regulations on public advocacy by family foundations, and on examples of what family foundations are doing in this area, see Establishing Grantmaking Interests and Priorities, p. 159.

Other resources designed to help foundations and nonprofits interested in particular aspects and issues of communications include:

- The Strategic Press Information Network (SPIN) — a program designed to provide media training to progressive nonprofit public interest groups.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Using Strategic Communication to Support Families* — a technical assistance guidebook for organizations involved in the foundation's *Making Connections* program to strengthen families with vulnerable children. (This guide outlines the broad range of activities involved in strategic communications, beyond simply obtaining positive media exposure.)
- *Now Hear This: The Nine Laws of Successful Advocacy Communications* — a publication that offers strategic guidance to groups seeking to develop effective advocacy campaigns. Published by Fenton Communications, with support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, *Now Hear This* provides basic ideas on how to shape public opinion and policy debates through the effective use of strategic marketing and communications.

Use of these and other communication resources will help you develop a communications strategy that is right for you. That strategy can range from an information program aimed at a small and specialized audience, to a larger program that can inform increasingly wider circles of the projects and other activities your new foundation supports. Over time, your communications may even shape popular opinion and public policy.

Communications Can Support the Mission

Family foundations have different missions and different practices in their effort to serve the community and the public. Some families may prefer to operate quietly and without fanfare, while others may prefer to promote the excellent work of their grantees or advocate for change. In any case, founders are well advised to give communications some serious thought early in the founding stage.

Communications can, after all, support the mission. Communications can help to build a community of support for foundation activities, acknowledge hardworking nonprofit workers and volunteers, and — who knows? — maybe even encourage other families to start their own foundation.