

FUNDING A TTY PROJECT

Richard C. Torbert

The funding of the Philadelphia project in telecommunications has been a complex task. It was finally achieved because after many months and years, it successfully drew on several separate resources to meet the fundamental requirements set by the funding agency, the George W. Nevil Trust, which is administered by Girard Bank, the Trustee, and guided by the Nevil Trust Advisory Committee.

The first question put by the Trust was focused on the degree of need. Who needs what and for what purpose? In some cases, such understanding already exists, borrowed from another city, perhaps. Here it was not, and you have already heard today how it was developed by survey of the deaf community.

Having established the need we passed to the program, the idea. Did it have a valid concept? What are the goals? What are the objectives? The goals are the changes you are going to make in the community. The objectives are the actions that are going to help you reach those goals. In too many instances, one fails to see the fundraiser develop an analysis projecting the kind of service he's actually going to deliver to the kind of person he's actually going to serve. The simple matter of the numbers of the persons being served, the staff you're going to need, the qualifications of that staff, the nature of the clients, the nature of the services and the projection of this data from month-to-month and year-to-year is something that too many people take for granted. Failing to analyze it for themselves, they are unable to persuade anyone else that it's worth supporting.

The organization itself is a third major aspect of the fund-raising venture. Does one already exist? Is there more than one that should be involved? Must a new organization be created? In the case of the Philadelphia TTY project, three organizations were involved which already existed. A fourth was created. It is usually an expensive proposition to create a new organization. In starting the Radio Information Center for the Blind, which preceded this project by a couple of years, it was necessary for the Nevil Trust to create a wholly new organization. We couldn't build on other strengths. This always renders a serious question as to how you can sustain the new organization after it is created.

Is the organization professionally qualified to do the job and is it financially capable? Is its board responsible and committed to the project? (In the case of the Nevil Trust, we have typically asked the Chairman of the Board to make that commitment in a court hearing, with all the legal ramifications that process entails.) Above all, is the organization's self-interest served by the program? Without such a benefit to the organization in terms of enhancing its capacity to raise money, its ability to perform a service better, its prestige; if you don't have such features, you probably don't have a permanent program.

A fourth element of a new program's appeal to the prospective funder is its community acceptance. How involved is the client constituency in the program, or on the organization's board? The growth of this involvement has been a slow and painful process in Philadelphia as

FUNDING A TTY PROJECT

well as everywhere else.

Of equal importance, of course, are the program costs and available resources. The projection previously mentioned should outline in the same time frame the costs that will be involved, month-by-month and year-by-year, including those in the future after the program achieves a permanent status. What other resources are available now and in the future: Philanthropic, governmental, client fees? One of the cardinal principals of the Nevil Trust has been if somebody else can do it, we'll stay out of it. Understanding of available resources is hard to come by in Philadelphia as elsewhere. More and more, we realize how important it is to understand the potential in government funding.

The picture of the future is itself a significant factor in the successful approach for funding. First of all, you should have a realistic action plan. Who's going to do what and when. Mastery of this simple exercise may make the difference between an objective reached and an objective not reached. How will the project be funded when we're out of it? The assumptions regarding client fees, governmental support, outside support - are they all valid? Too often we see people making the assumption that if they have a great idea involving a needed service, it's bound to be attractive enough once it's on its feet to get community support. This kind of assumption is fallacious unless the program's expense relative

to the total budget of the organization is small enough so that it doesn't present a potential problem. Here, again, however, even the \$10,000 expense per year for a million dollar organization may be too much, if there's no self-interest served.

Also in thinking of the future, the question arises of evaluation. Usually this evaluation is desirable periodically in the project history, for the staff, for the funders, and for the world. Most of the programs we have supported have had value beyond the projects themselves as models. We have urged the participants to think in terms of reporting to their peers for whatever educational values which might accrue.

Finally, there's the proposal itself. Does it hang together? Is it sufficiently well-organized to insure project integrity? If not, is outside drafting assistance appropriate? Sometimes we are able to provide assistance in this area. The problem with such aid from the funder, however, is that it might cover up fatal flaws in the organization of a project: the project itself might be intrinsically invalid or its sponsor so weak and poorly organized that it could never manage the program successfully.

In conclusion, I would stress the most significant of all these requirements set by the Nevil Trust: will the proposal make a difference? I trust you will agree, having heard the other speakers this morning, that the Philadelphia TTY project has already done so.