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## How to Afford All the Capacity Building You Really Need

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### Question:

How can you ensure all your organization's efforts are healthy, fully capable of creating significant improvement in your community, when the cost is outside your reach?

### We Can't Afford It

In our experience, community organizations understand what they need to be and do, to accomplish amazing things for their communities.

They know they need to address big picture community changes and big picture internal changes; they need overall plans and overall strength; they need systems and succession work and sustainability planning. They know this is what will get them past the constant battle to put out fires, and move them on towards creating an amazing future for their communities.

The problem is that while organizations know what they need to do, they believe they cannot afford to do it.

And so, what they do instead is to gather the small amounts of money they believe are all they can find, to address whatever is on fire. Those bigger things - the things that can really make a difference - remain perpetually on hold.

And of course the irony is that until all those other issues are addressed, there will continue to be fire after fire, and they will continue to be unable to afford anything!

So what is the answer? The answer is not a grant. It is not a Sugar Daddy.

## Use It Today

### Thinking Outside Your 4 Walls

The answer is to bust down the walls - the walls that keep our organizations separate from the rest of the community.

Those walls tell us, "We are indeed separate. Capacity Building is a proprietary process, to build our own organization's strength, so we can compete better, and therefore work better. We must do that work on our own, so no one knows our secrets but our consultant. Coke doesn't share its secrets with Pepsi - why should we share our secrets with our competition? Capacity Building is about US!"

Of course we don't think this consciously. But those 4 walls do affect what we look for in Capacity Building, and how we consider we can pay for that, all because we assume we are separate from everyone else out there doing the same work as our organization.

## How Stepping Outside those 4 Walls Makes All the Difference

When we step outside those 4 walls, we stop asking, "Where can we get a grant for this?" Instead, we begin by asking,

"If we were to aim at making our community an amazing place to live, who would our natural partners be? And what if we were to learn together how we can all become strong enough to create significantly more impact?"

The impact of that shared approach to capacity building is almost overwhelming.

1. First, you will spend time with other groups who care about what you care about.
2. From spending all that time together, you will build great relationships. You will see possibilities you never saw before, far beyond the work you initially contracted to accomplish.
3. It is fundable - infinitely fundable. Picture 3 or 5 or 7 organizations going to a funder (or a group of funders - get them to collaborate, too!) and asking, "We would like to all learn together and grow strong together - to plan together, strengthen our boards together, to learn to sustain our efforts together, and to see what could grow from that." Can you imagine a funder on the planet not drooling over that proposal?
4. The cost becomes reasonable. That is because what might have seemed like an astronomical project for one group is now shared among 3 or 5 or 7 groups. What a funder will see is in every way a bargain - a comprehensive capacity building initiative that will have far more benefit than just the mere learning, at a cost they likely would have spent had they given each of those 5 organizations small grants for more narrowly-defined (i.e. ineffective) capacity building efforts.
5. What truly is proprietary stays that way. A good facilitator and teacher knows when to give groups work-alone time, and when to gather them back together. There is no reason the group cannot all learn and create their own plans, and yet come back together to share what they have learned from that process.
6. The obligation on the part of the participating organizations is nothing more than to show up and spend time together in a spirit of possibility. None of the groups is obligated to do anything together beyond that. And with no expectations, there are no turf issues. The groups share their resources and spend time together, and what happens from there is gravy.
7. Lastly, the focus stays on the community, because that is the reason you have all gathered together. The question of capacity building is seen for what it is - means to an end. Which brings us back to the outcomes we were talking with the group about in our office last week. These weren't outcomes for the organization; they were outcomes for the community, using the organization merely as a vessel, the means to that Community-Driven end result.

## It Works

How do we know all these things will happen? We have run such groups, in various shapes and forms, for organizations across the country. It is how we run all our community-wide workshops - as shared facilitations. The groups learn from each other, and then they spend time applying what they are learning to their own work.

We have also been involved with innovative long term initiatives, from Lincoln, Nebraska to Phoenix, Arizona. These longer term initiatives allow the participants get to know and trust each other over time. It is not unusual for some of these groups to keep meeting for years after the project is over, having built trust relationships together.

## Just Do It!

So what could you accomplish for your organization and for your community if you dreamed your biggest dream, and then stepped outside your 4 walls to share that work with others?

The box - those 4 walls that say MINE ME US - and THEM - those walls will be our undoing. What we can accomplish together is 10 times / 100 times / 1,000 times what we can accomplish alone. We need each other. So let's knock down those imaginary walls, and let's see what we could do if we were to do it together!



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