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Start-ups: Showing a Track Record

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Question:

How do we show a track record, when we are just starting out?

Use It Today

The following tips are excerpted from **What Do Funders Want? (And Why Do They Want It?): A Guide to Using Other People's Money to Do Your Work**.

🚩 Tip #1: The Homework

Everybody says, "Do your homework." But what is that homework? What should you be learning? One of the most common issues raised by those who start organizations is that they don't know what they don't know! The solution? Ask lots of questions of lots of people. For more information, check the links at the bottom of this article.

🚩 Tip #2: The Track Record

Start-ups do not spring out of nowhere. They spring from your personal history, your commitment, and yes, your homework. In its own way, that is the beginning of a track record!

So show that. First show your personal track record. Have you done similar work, and this is merely an extension of the real-world experience you already have? Note that.

Second, show that you have done your homework. That homework is indeed part of the history of the organization. Your description might look like this:

Project Phase 1 - research and community engagement

Project Phase 2 - start-up and implementation

If you have done your homework and done it well, you will not be just beginning; you will be in Phase 2 of the program - the phase where you prove it works!

🚩 Tip #3: Get Some History Under Your Belt.

Once you have done your homework, just get started. You may have to start small, but find a way to just begin doing the work, however you can, without being funded to do so. This will give you the opportunity to prove that not only have you done your homework, but that homework resulted in a program that really works.

Even in just that small demonstration, you will be building a track record. Then, when you do ask for money, you are not asking for start-up funds; you are seeking funding to expand the program, to scale it up.

🚩 Tip #4: Begin Engaging the Community

A big part of your track record will include the extent to which the community is behind you in your efforts. And it is never too early to start gaining community support for your work!

If you do your homework well, you will have already begun that engagement process. For more information on how to create truly engaged programs, this article can help:


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Tip #5: Funding is the LAST step, not the first

This may not seem like it directly has to do with building a track record, but hold on - it does.

Most folks starting out tend to leap from “I have a great idea” to “I need to get a grant (or other funding) to move forward.” It is only when they start digging into the grant application that they are faced with the frustration that they are being asked to prove they can do something they have never done.

That is why this tip is here: We know you will likely seek funding before you are ready. So slow down and make yourself ready.

Seeking funding is the LAST step in your project. And when it comes to seeking funding, seeking grants is then the LAST step in the list of possible fundraising activities.

(Most grants will ask you to list other sources of income. How can you create that list unless you have done that other resource development work first?)

The second-to-last step of the project is developing a fundraising / resource development plan. And creating your budget is the third-to-last step.

So what is the first step? To do your homework, develop a plan, get to work on Tips 1-4, and hone your project.

Anyone can have a good idea. In the for-profit world, more than 1 out of 2 start-ups fail. In the nonprofit world, start-ups often fail in a different way - volunteer founders keep them going forever at their own expense.

Unlike the business world, where a failed start-up simply goes out of business, “failing” start-ups in the nonprofit world lead to years of frustration and burn-out, and a lack of impact in the community. To avoid that, your best chance is to aim your project at succeeding from the start. And that start is not about money; it is about being a bit more patient and doing your planning and your homework first.

Starting a Community Benefit Organization is an exhilarating and yes, exhausting adventure. We know - we have founded 2 already, and are on our way to starting another! By taking the time to do it well, though, you are ensuring your community will benefit from your efforts for years to come.



What Do Funders Want? (And Why Do They Want It?) ▶ [Click](#)
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 Attention Start-ups: Do Your Homework! ▶ [Click](#)

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