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Technology
How Corporate Givers Are Taming Technology
by Martin B. Schneiderman

In February, I had the opportunity to interview the leaders of 55 of the largest U.S. corporate grantmaking organizations. I've worked closely with many of these organizations during the past five years. I was particularly interested in learning about their plans for using technology in their grantmaking operations. They described some big changes that have taken place in just the last 12 months.

For example, technology has been used widely by corporate grantmakers, but it has not always been well integrated into the business process. Now it is, and has become an essential management tool to support corporate objectives, to understand program impacts and to facilitate decisionmaking.

Mel Cathcart, president of the Time Warner Foundation, explains, "We're experiencing merger mania and change at a rate that we've never seen before." Today, the "demands of business" are driving corporate grantmakers to use technology to:

- streamline their operations,
- link field offices worldwide,
- enhance communications and build stronger relationships with nonprofits,
- conduct better research and objective evaluations, and
- improve reporting to management and the public.

The Demand for More, Faster
Technology has been a driving force in our nation's booming economy. It's also causing corporate grantmakers to rethink how they do their jobs, and how they communicate with their colleagues and constituencies.

Toni Bailey, Boeing-McDonnell's foundation president, says, "Measurement is the language of business" and grants management systems must provide ready access to accurate, up-to-date information.

Web publishing is growing in importance too, says Paula Banks, BP Amoco's vice president of Global Social Investment.

Employee Involvement

Corporations are now using the Web to expand employee participation in their matching gift and volunteer programs. Twenty corporate clients have subscribed to the J.K. Group's "EasyMatch" service, which provides employees and retirees with secure on-line Web-based access to infor mation about a company's giving program.

With the proliferation of e-commerce, staff members now want systems that permit them to make matching gift contributions on-line via credit card. Such systems are planned for later this year.

Relationships are Key

Corporate grantmakers explain that establishing and maintaining relationships with nonprofit leaders is critical to the success of their philanthropic programs. E-mail has proven to be an effective tool to facilitate this, and Internet-based collaboration tools can do even more. Funders emphasize that they are planning to use technology to enhance relationships-not to insulate them from their nonprofit partners.

Web-based Grant Applications

About two-thirds of the corporate grantmakers that I met with are either currently inviting grantseekers to submit applications on-line or planning to do so in the future. Many nonprofits like this option and funders benefit from improved efficiency of data acquisition. In a recent United Way poll of Michigan nonprofits, more than 75 percent report having the Internet access necessary to submit proposals on-ine. There was wide-spread concern that inviting on-line proposals could result in a flood of new unsolicited proposals. However, a well-conceived and properly implemented on-line application process can screen out many ineligible requests and direct grantseekers to other appropriate funding sources. Few of the systems in operation today realize this potential.

None of the corporate executives that I met with are planning to make on-line applications the exclusive means of proposal submission. Maureen Gorman, vice president of GTE Foundation, says, "Traffic is rapidly moving to the Internet, increasing efficiency all around. However, we continue to accept proposals and communicate with nonprofits in the many ways that we communicate with our customers."

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Back to Index