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**Social Entrepreneurs and Grant Professionals:
Sustaining Environmental and Energy Resources**

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurs transform opportunities into action for social and economic development and serve as leaders and change agents in private, nonprofit, and governmental sectors throughout the world (Martin, R. L. & Osberg, S., 2007). Grant professionals, not unlike social entrepreneurs, help design innovative solutions to environmental and societal challenges. National and international demands for energy accessibility and affordability are increasing and carry burdens of social and environmental injustices (International Energy Agency, 2011). Such demands and concerns of climate change and the interdependence of energy and environmental resources require expertise beyond a single sector. Social scientists, social entrepreneurs, and grant professionals have information and skills to increase social and economic development in response to the human side of these concerns. This article provides suggestions for grant professionals who work to diversify resources and bring the entrepreneur's vision to fruition in the quest for sustaining environmental and energy resources.

Introduction

Social entrepreneurs and grant professionals are important partners in interdisciplinary collaborative efforts that increase access to essential resources like energy and water while protecting environmental and societal well-being. Complex social and economic problems require multidisciplinary and cross-sector engagement of philanthropic partners, corporations, and investors in ventures that result in social and economic benefits (Harper-Dorton, 2012). Social entrepreneurs, grant professionals, human service providers, governmental entities, and for-profit and non-profit corporations alike are important change agents in helping shape societal and environmental sustainability well beyond the foreseeable future.

Based on earlier work by Harding (2006), Urban (2013) defines social entrepreneurship,

... as an attempt at new social enterprise activity or new enterprise creation, such as self-employment, a new enterprise, or the expansion of an existing social enterprise by an individual, teams of individuals or an established social enterprise, with social or community goals as its base and where the profit is invested in the activity or venture itself rather than returned to investors (p. 6).

Grant professionals bring competencies and skills to collaboratives and partnerships where enthusiasm and expectations run high. For example, they help guard against inadequate administrative structures for strategic planning and fundraising that are needed to realize truly innovative visions. Key skills include (1) identifying fundable projects and funding streams, (2) establishing strategies and involving others in effective project development, (3) developing well written fundable requests for support with consistent objectives and measurable outcomes, (4) educating partners regarding ethical practices, and (5) meeting reporting standards for project implementation that strengthen future relationships with various organizations and funders (Validated Competencies and Skills, 2007).

Complexities are Abundant: Sustaining Environmental and Energy Resources

Any effort to address the importance of sustaining or growing environmental resources for the welfare of present and future societies also requires an understanding of the implications of the problem to be addressed. Energy poverty is a serious challenge for as much as 20 percent of the world's population (International Energy Agency, 2011). However, merely providing access to electricity without attention to affordability does not assure utilization. One study in three developing countries reports that very poor countries may technically have access but continue to experience energy poverty. As grid connections for households become more prevalent, electricity utilization is increasingly more dependent upon affordability or price. Policy and tariff changes, government subsidies, and public education initiatives help bolster the utilization of accessible energy (Winkler, Simoes, La Rovere, Alam, & Rahman, 2011).

More than just a lack of access, energy poverty also involves issues of distance and affordability. Large rural areas in developing countries, especially parts of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, harbour large populations without access to electricity or clean water and even cooking facilities. There are about 1.3 billion people who lack access to electricity and about 2.6 billion without sanitary cooking facilities. Alarming, rural areas are heavily impacted by the lack of energy and cooking facilities where distance and affordability further hamper accessibility for approximately 84 percent of impoverished rural populations in these and other world regions. (International Energy Agency, 2011). Issues of social justice emerge because there is no doubt that energy access is critical to reducing poverty, hunger, child mortality, HIV/AIDS, and malaria. Better education, social equality, health care, and environmental sustainability are not daily realities for populations lacking access to affordable energy. Without regard to protecting natural resources, economic development frequently equates with

environmental degradation for disadvantaged populations. For example, consider rural landfills that become garbage dumps as urban areas transport garbage beyond their confines.

Shaping the Social Economy of the Future: Grant Professionals Have a Role

Located in the third sector, sometimes known as the nonprofit sector or the civil society, the social economy has roots in antiquity along with charities, foundations, and volunteers where mission is more important than profit (Lohmann, 1992). Poor areas, poor people, and social justice are important concerns of the third sector. Social entrepreneurs and grant professionals recognize not only the necessity to generate profits for economic development but also to invest in human and social issues for the welfare of communities and societies (Constantin & Doina, 2013).

More than ever before, social entrepreneurs are being recognized in developing nations and emerging economies. Accounts of green technologies and renewable energy projects also abound in the United States through solar energy development, clean water conservation, and geothermal power generation. Increased utilization of green or clean technologies calls for conserving natural resources, protecting the environment, and reducing negative impacts or emissions from human activities. For example, a nonprofit agricultural-research organization in Oklahoma is experimenting with switch grass to produce ethanol. Other initiatives include fuel-efficient automobiles, projects to transform trash into crude oil, and educational seminars that promote energy security via alternatives to fossil fuel. Corporations, governmental, and civil society sectors are partnering for energy security, clean water, and to enhance the sustainability of natural resources. For instance, the U.S. Departments of Energy and Commerce as well as corporate energy companies award grants for many start-up activities. Initially funded by the Farmers Home Administration, in southeast South Dakota the Clay Rural Water System (CRWS) uses reservoirs and pipelines to provide clean water to five counties. The CRWS now operates independently on a fee-for service basis (Clay Rural Water System, Inc., n.d.).

Challenges and Opportunities for Grant Professionals

Social entrepreneurs and grant professionals share the common traits of vision and mission along with strong capacities for recognizing and seizing opportunities for innovation. Experienced professionals active in the proposal development, project implementation and management or assessment arenas have expertise and abilities to mentor others. Indeed, successful proposals to fund innovative complex projects that ameliorate multifaceted concerns hold many rewards and challenges. Grant professionals commonly strategize, coordinate, and educate to achieve successful project implementation and meet stated outcome measures. Social entrepreneurs and grant professionals who are leaders in the broad development field, therefore, demonstrate four foundational capacities:

Collaboration and Partnership: Collaborating and partnering with experts on the background and purpose of an innovative idea ripe for funding expands the knowledge base and builds relationships. Working together, a team of specialists expedite learning, better outcomes, dissemination of best-practices through publications, and patent requirements, among other shared outcomes. Collaboratives and partnerships have advantages but also face challenges, like power and territory struggles, are expensive in terms of time involved in decision-making, and may encounter mission drift.

Scale Vision, Innovation, and Impact: An entrepreneur's vision for change offers experienced grant professionals the opportunity to evaluate a project's value in terms of innovation and likelihood of achieving project outcomes or community impacts. Scaling both vision and project scope to correspond with organizational capacity and expertise, can indeed burst the visionary's bubble yet ultimately result in a manageable and fundable project. In addition, grant professionals provide consultation to planners, staff, junior principal investigators, and stakeholders in areas such as strategic planning and project development.

Obtain, Diversify, and Sustain Funding Streams: Matching funding resources with project needs requires wide-ranging familiarity with varied funders and funding streams. Successful grant professionals are familiar with online search engines for foundations, and federal, state, and local government agencies. Other sources include internal and external support for meeting various cost sharing/matching requirements or indirect costs. Grant funded projects offer opportunities to leverage multiple funding streams, such as donations, or even revenue similar to that generated by the Clay Rural Water System as previously described. Leveraging funding and anticipating future needs are important often challenging realities that must be addressed to promote project sustainability. Justifying project sustainability beyond the life of a grant calls for successful outcome assessments as well as strategic plans for continued funding to promote long-term success.

Ethical Practices and Professionalism: Educating the content expert, though sometimes inexperienced, principal investigator in ethical practices of transparency when managing funding, stakeholders, and staff, while respecting privileged and confidential information, is critical. Ethical and transparent practices build credibility for both the grant professional and principal investigator, as well as for partnering agencies and target populations.

Conclusion

This article is timely as debates of potential climate changes continue. Corporations and governmental sources develop and redefine funding opportunities amid discussions in the spirit of environmental and energy sustainability. Opportunities abound for grant professionals and social entrepreneurs to join ranks to develop interdisciplinary collaborations. Advancing energy production and utilization while ensuring renewable resource protection in culturally appropriate contexts is essential for economic and social well-being in every nation, not just for those facing energy poverty.

Biographical Information

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