Winning Resources and Support

Pharmacy in Third World countries

Terry
Alan Davidson is a member of academic staff at the Open University. Before joining us, Alan worked for a period as a grant maker, running a charitable trust with a very specific field of operation. Alan, can you tell us a bit about your experience?

Alan
For about 10 years I lived and worked in the Netherlands and was the Chief Executive of a professional organisation for Pharmacists. In 1995, the organisation decided to set up a separate charity called the FIP Foundation for Education and Research and poured about a quarter of a million euros into the charity, to start it up. And I was the Chief Executive of the charity for about five years, in the early stages of its development.

Terry
What sort of projects did you fund?

Alan
The aim of the charity was primarily to do with the development of Pharmacists and the profession of Pharmacy in Third World countries. So we funded projects to do with research into Malaria, into Diabetes in Nigeria, into various other things in Latin America. So the bulk of our funding was into developing countries.

Terry
How do you think that funders like the FIP Foundation for Education and Research see the relationship between themselves and the organisation, and individuals or projects they fund?

Alan
One of the problems from the FIP Foundation's point of view is because the projects were in developing countries, it was impossible for us to have oversight of the projects when they were running. So, much of the effort that we put into getting and granting money, was in the early stages where we had to evaluate projects. Like many other charities, we always had many more requests for funding than we had funds available, so we had to find some form of prioritisation and from that point of view we would build up a relationship at the grant bid stage. And again we had a relationship, more one of accounting than anything else, towards the end, because what we did was we split the grant into three parts, and the first third of the award was given right at the beginning, when the grant was made.

The second tranche of the grant was made half way through the projected length of the scheme or project or whatever it was and that was dependent on receiving a report of how the project was progressing. And the last third of the grant money was not released until a final project report was made and there was a set of accounts produced, because clearly any charity wants to make sure that the money that it gives is spent in accordance with the bid and not wasted.

Terry
Can you give me an example of a project, which you've funded, and which you really felt furthered your aims as a Trust?

Alan
It was a slightly strange project from the point of view that it was something that we'd never done before. But we had a request from a Pharmacist in Zimbabwe, who wanted some money in order to produce a series of very short radio broadcasts. What had happened was

that he'd got involved in some charities in Africa and despite the fact that we think that Aids and cancer and other diseases are the big killers, in fact the big killer in developing countries are simple things to us, things like clean water, things like diarrhoea, particularly we're talking about children here. And what he wanted to do was to provide local radio stations with short five minute public health broadcasts.

So we discussed the project and in the end we gave the Pharmacist about five thousand euros and what was interesting for us, was that over the next year or eighteen months we got a series of letters from radio stations all over the world from Africa, from South East Asia, from some parts of Latin America, thanking us for sponsoring these radio broadcasts.

Any project that we fund, needs to be in line with the Foundation's aims and objectives and the Foundation takes quite a broad view on what education involves, and therefore for somebody to come up with an innovative project is always welcome, particularly if it is, how can I say, if it's scaleable, to meet our world-wide objectives, rather than something which is quite local and may be specific to a particular town or a particular state, or a particular country. Because FIP and its Foundation is a truly world-wide organisation, so if you can get a world-wide project then that is really something which is good.

Terry
What is the best way for an applicant to find out about the policy of a Trust like the FIP Foundation?

Alan
Because the FIP Foundation is a truly world-wide organisation, what we did was to make a lot of documentation available. When the Foundation was being set up in the mid 90s it was the developmental phase of the internet and that was really good for us, because what we could do was publish our guidelines on the internet. Other things we did was, one of the conditions of being awarded a grant is that the final project report is available for us to publish and we took to publishing the reports again primarily on the internet, although we could produce them as printed copy, so that people who were interested in applying for grants could see the sort of work which had obtained grant financing in previous years. And therefore it would give them a good idea of what was important to the Foundation, and how the aims and objectives of the Foundation, the theory if you like, could be met by the practice of project reports and how the money was spent.

Terry
Were there any sorts of organisations, which you wouldn't want to apply to you?

Alan
The Foundation was a fairly small organisation and what we wanted to avoid when we were setting up the procedures, for grants, were people who for whom it was clear we would never ever make grants to. Clearly the FIP Foundation was involved in the improvement of public health, so we didn't want people applying for grants who weren't in the business of improving, in some way, public health. We spent a lot of time, as a new board developing clear guidelines. It didn't always work. We still got inappropriate applications, but I have to say that in my time at the FIP Foundation, the number of really inappropriate grants were probably in single percentage figures. And very much related to that is the clarity of the guidelines, and a clear statement that any grant application had to align itself to the aims and objectives of the Foundation.

Terry
What would you have been looking for in an application that would have made you pick it out from the many you'd have received and say 'Yes! That's what we need to be putting our resources into?'

Alan
When we received applications, for grants, there was a preliminary screening process before the grant applications would go on to the evaluation committee, who would take the final decision. From the screening process, what was absolutely critical, to get beyond the initial

screening, into the evaluation committee, was how the applicant aligned the grant bid to the aims and objectives of the Foundation. If they didn't, because we always had more applications than we could possibly fund, the application would get rejected at the screening stage without any further investigation.

So, what would make me say yes, or what would make the evaluation committee say yes would be clarity, brevity, a clear linkage between the purpose of the project and the purposes of the Foundation, those were the keys to success. Oh yes and making sure the application came in by the final date for submission.

One of the things that would make it a more attractive bid, for granting funds would be some form of sustainability, something which would suggest that once the funding was finished, because we very rarely made more than one grant to one individual or organisation, once the funding was finished, would this person or organisation that we had given a grant to, be able to continue in a way that would meet our objectives?

And if I give you a very simple example of that, I remember one grant that we made was to do with health education of young children in Nigeria where the pharmacist concerned wanted to set up fairly simple and rudimentary health clinics in schools in Nigeria and part of the project was an investigation into other sources of funding, so that when our funding finished the pharmacist had already scoped or sourced other means of fundraising, to enable the project to continue after the end of the period which we'd helped to fund.

Terry
A final question Alan, how important to the FIP Foundation was evaluating the effectiveness of the work you funded?

Alan
I think that's quite a difficult question because different organisations will have different models that they work to and it's very important for the applicant to understand the model that's being used. In the FIP Foundation case, our partnership with those that we fund is actually quite an arms length relationship, partly because they tended to be in far away places and partly because unlike many charities we were less concerned with the need to measure outcomes directly. The priority was to fund projects that we felt had a good prospect of making a difference to health in developing countries. But measuring health improvement as you know is an incredibly difficult and expensive area and we didn't want the grant money that we were giving to be diverted into expensive evaluation.

So in a sense the philanthropic nature of the organisation meant that we were not so concerned with strict evaluation. Having said that, it was important for me as an administrator to use the opportunity of the grants that we were making, in order to raise awareness, because unlike some other charities I also had to raise funds, in order to develop the organisation, in order to grow it in size, and therefore be able to make more and larger grants in the future. So the evaluation committee who actually made the decision would be less concerned with things like public relations and raising awareness. But if there was a possibility of being able to tap into a network which might generate more funds that would be quite important to me as an administrator. Raising more money was always an interesting challenge as Chief Executive.