

Go Big or Go Home

- Funding in the form of government and foundation grants will continue to evolve so I don't really want to speak to what's what at the moment.
- By the time you are writing your next grant, the terms may have changed again.
- What I do want to focus on is what gets you money right now.
- Certain key realities:
 - Money is always tight
 - Culture may be necessary to community sustainability but no one wants to fund it "too much"
 - Most citizen surveys say that the level of funding is "about right" but how do they know?
 - Culture, when push comes to shove, will always be deemed a "frill"
 - Grant reviewers always start by looking for stars and dogs
 - Which are the exemplary programs? Who is demonstrating continuous improvement in their operation?
 - Which are the tired, "same old/same old" programs
 - Which applications are missing information and can be kicked out immediately?
 - Example from Canada Council and the water park
 - Demonstrate Value: Depending on the funder, they have different definitions of value but value is always at the heart of a funding decision.
 - Your job is to demonstrate the value of your program in terms the granting panel can appreciate: Determine this up front and then tell the story well.
 - Telling a good story isn't enough if there isn't valuable substance behind the story and value doesn't get you anywhere if you don't tell the story well and often.
- What's "Go Big"?
 - Going big is many things but it is ultimately about making your operation better. That requires big thinking and big ideas.

- There are always operations out there doing things better than you do. Steal from the best!
- Some examples:
 - Making everything about families
 - Decordova
 - Making everything about accessibility
 - Making everything about quality of experience. If you can't do it well, question why you are doing it at all.
 - About partnerships that are new and add value
 - Social programs/Settlement services
 - About bringing new resources that are better than what's been available before
 - Exhibitions from other sources
 - Programming that responds to changes in the marketplace
 - Services that dovetail with established needs identified by other non-profits or non-users in the community
- Why "Go Big"?
 - Because change is what drives visits and people's sense of your organization being valuable
 - Government grantors
 - Community groups
 - Local populations: The rule of 25%
 - Going big attracts and retains visitors, better partners and money. Why?
 - People like to be associated with success
 - People like to be associated with innovation
 - People like to be able to prove they have chosen well in supporting your operation
- Need to benchmark and evaluate
 - Quantities associated with bigger experience
 - Qualities associated with bigger experience
 - How the experience translates into better sustainability for your organization
 - How the experience translates into economic development for your community (TRIEM)
 - What failed to work

- Explain in applications what you've learned and what changes you're making as a result.
- Need to tell your story to the world at large
 - Spend time and money blowing your horn
 - You never know who will be on next year's grants panel
 - Make sure people talk about you: nothing is more powerful than word of mouth
 - Media clippings are wonderful supports for the next application as they are arm's length
 - Buzz matters in terms of making you appear consistently "Big"
 - A positive profile will help you get the funding to continue to grow and improve.